SYNERGY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 2: NO.6

EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF CINEMA AND LITERATURE

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Christmas Evil

In This Issue

Trash for Xmas
A Rev Heads Guide to Xmas
Exclusive Interview with Don Loffler: Author of F.J. Holden, Holden Together, She's a Beauty and Me and My Holden.

The Worlds of Terry Pratchett
The Cinema of Walerian Borowczyk
The Unusual World of Japanese Crime Noir: The Work of Suzuki Seijun
British Crime Cinema: A Retrospective

Crime for Christmas: Special Reviews Section

Artist Profiles

PLUS

All Our Normal Reviews Departments
Comedy, Horror, Erotica, Toys, Books and Lots more

Synergy Magazine

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Australia
www.synergy-magazine.com

Editors
Robert Black & Bob Estreich

Proof Reader
Fiona Jones

Ho Ho Ho !

I read recently that some schools were being told to educate their Santa's about the possible offence some girls could take to the above traditional Xmas welcome! Well, I am politically incorrect and have no special beef with sex workers, so am still willing to take the risk of using it as my opener to our Xmas issue.

It has been an amazing year, six large issues, all available free for download and via print on demand. The horror issue (*Volume No.5 Halloween Horror*) was so large we ended up having to carry over reviews to this issue. It is amazing just how many new and interesting films are being released. Our toys and collectibles section has expanded to include all manner of strangeness from plush to vinyl, even some fascinating art posters.

We have especially been working hard to expand our range of features offering more in-depth explorations of the various cinema genres.

Again, I think the *Halloween issue* hit a record for the amazing number of features included and the depth of coverage from the strange erotica of Bruce La Bruce to Nunsploitation, from Vampires to Freddie !

We aim to continue this trend and the first issues for 2010 will be Science Fiction, Sin-ema! (on erotic and adult cinema), 10 which will explore 10 directors and Cinematic Contraband on exploitation cinema.

We have also enjoyed expanded our comedy and erotica sections. These were new genre categories but have worked well with solid feedback.

In this issue we have some new and interesting features including a special Crime on DVD review section, a feature on Terry Pratchett and some Xmas guides including "A Rev Heads Guide to Xmas" and "Trash for Xmas".

Enjoy !

The Editors and team at Synergy wish you a happy holiday.

INFORMACION

Synergy Reviews DVDs from all regions.

The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

NTSC or **PAL** is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

DVD-R refers to small DVD-R companies which market rare titles which are out of copyright.

We review titles from a range of ratings, if a title could be considered "adult" we also include a extra rating of either **M** (Mature) or **E** (Explicit).

Blu Ray

We only review All Region and Region B titles.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is blu-ray.com. It includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

Web: http://www.blu-ray.com

Publication Details

Print and Digital Editions: Six issues a year

Online: Daily Updates

Reviewers

The motley crew of Synergy Magazine includes Robert Black, Bob Estreich, Michelle Taylor, Fiona Johns as well as occasional freelance reviewers.

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The print edition Synergy Magazine is published six times a year and includes reviews from the website with extra materials, articles and features, extended reviews, added images, screen shorts and competitions.

Features, *articles*, *news* and *competitions* only appear in the digital and print editions.

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The movie posters and clip art used are believed to be within the public domain. We apologize for any errors and if we have used a image in error, please advise and we will run an attribution notice.

GIVEAWAYS

What better way to wile the day away but with a beer and some music. What better music to drink to than Beer Songs, 101 in all over 5 CDS ! Or perhaps you prefer movie music.

Thanks to Andy at EMI we have five copies of each to give away so send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with Music in the subject line and the first ten entries will win. Giveaway starts when the pdf hits the website !!

Last issue we reviewed the marvellously strange plus toys from Rotten Dollies in New Zealand.
http://www.rottendollies.com/
We especially liked Harry the Bigfoot and Blaine the Ninja Star.

We have one of each of these lovelies to give away.

Send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with Rotten Dolls in the subject line and the first two entries will win. Giveaway starts when the pdf hits the website !!

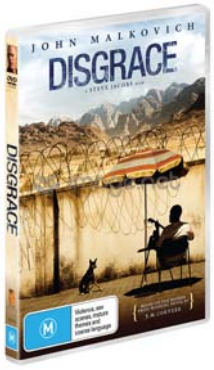
Mary and Max

Mary and Max is a Claymation feature film from the creators of the Academy Award winning short animation *Harvie Krumpet*.

It is a simple tale of penfriendship between two very different people; Mary Dinkle, a chubby lonely eight year old girl living in the suburbs of Melbourne, and Max Horovitz, a 44 year old, severely obese, Jewish man with Asperger's Syndrome living in the chaos of New York.

Thanks to Tom at Icon we have fifteen DVDs to give away so send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with MM in the subject line and the first 15 entries will win. Giveaway starts when the pdf hits the website !!

Disgrace



David Lurie, twice-divorced and dissatisfied with his job as an English professor in post-apartheid South Africa, finds his life falling apart. When he seduces one of his students, and in doing nothing to protect himself from the consequences, he is dismissed from his teaching position, and takes refuge on his daughter's farm in the Eastern Cape.

Thanks to Tom at Icon we have fifteen DVDs to give away so send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with disgrace in the subject line and the first 15 entries will win. Giveaway starts when the pdf hits the website !!

Blood:The Last Vampire
R4 DVD
Madman Entertainment
R Rated

Demons have infested the earth. And only one warrior stands between the dark and the light: Saya, a half-human, half-vampire samurai who preys on those who feast on human blood. Joining forces with the shadowy society known as the Council, Saya is dispatched to an American military base, where an intense series of sword-fights leads her to the deadliest vampire of all. And now after 400 years, Saya's final hunt is about to begin.

This is the live action film based on the Anime series and has received rave reviews. It is R Rated for violence.

We have three copies to give away thanks to Madman Entertainment.

Send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Blood:The Last Vampire* in the subject line and three entries chosen at Random on 20th December will receive a copy.

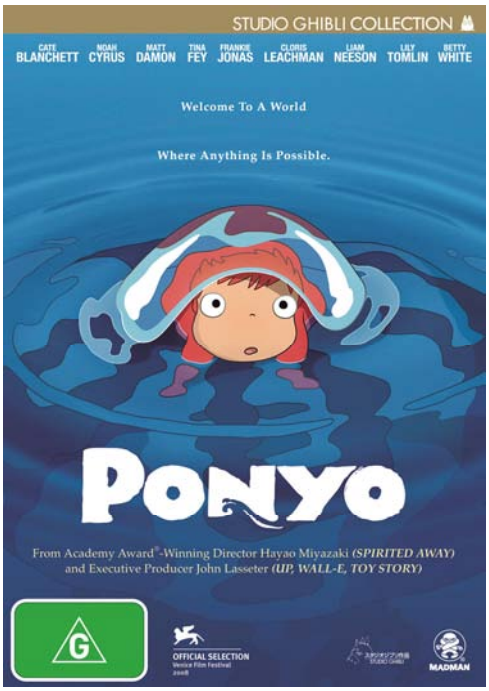
Ponyo
R4 DVD
Madman Entertainment
G Rated

In a small town by the sea lives five year-old Sosuke, high on a cliff overlooking the Inland Sea. One morning while playing on the rocky beach below his house, he discovers a goldfish named Ponyo, her head stuck in a jam jar. Sosuke rescues Ponyo and keeps her in a green plastic bucket.

Both Ponyo and Sosuke are fascinated by each other and promise to stay firm friends until Ponyo's father - once human, now a sorcerer who lives deep under the sea - forces her to return with him to the ocean depths. What follows is an amazing underwater adventure for all ages....

We have three copies to give away thanks to Madman Entertainment.

Send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Ponyo* in the subject line and three entries chosen at Random on 20th December will receive a copy



Harry Potter

Harry Potter Ultimate Editions
Blu-ray and DVD 18th November 2009

Warner Home Video is creating a whole new way for muggles, wizards and Harry Potter fans to see the world's # 1 film franchise.

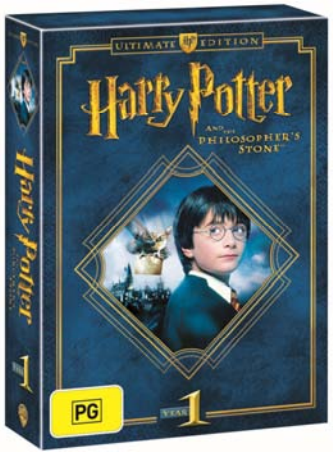
Beginning 18th November 2009, the studio will release on Blu-ray and DVD the first two of eight *Harry Potter Ultimate Editions*. Each of the Ultimate Editions will include a new one-hour featurette that highlights a unique aspect of the filmmaking process and will be combined to make the complete 8-hour documentary, *Creating the World of Harry Potter*.

Ultimate Editions include five hours of special features (one hour of which is the new featurette); theatrical and extended versions of the film; 48-page collectible photo book and other magical collectibles.

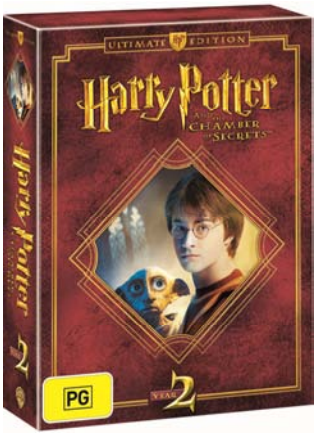
With newly produced featurettes, both extended cut and theatrical versions included, premium packaging and themed collectibles, plus a Digital Copy of the theatrical film, the *Harry Potter Ultimate Editions* are bound to be irresistible gifts for this holiday season.

They will sell for $94.95RRP on 3-disc Blu-ray and $79.95RRP on 4-disc DVD.

The Blu-ray editions include all the DVD contents plus the In-Movie Experience with director Chris Columbus - an interactive viewer experience.



Picture in Picture, Storyboard Comparisons, Still Galleries, as well as BD live with access to worldwide events, special guest participants, community features and more.



The five Harry Potter films comprise the biggest film franchise in history, totalling a worldwide box-office gross, to date, in excess of $4.4 billion.

The sixth and latest instalment, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,* ensures that "Pottermania" continues unabated.

The Blu-ray disc of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* will feature Warner Bros. Maximum Movie Mode, an interactive viewing experience that examines the entire film with such features as Focus Points, Picture-in-Picture, photo galleries and more. Maximum Movie Mode includes commentary from director David Yates, producers David Heyman and David Barron, as well as cast members Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson and Tom Felton.

Synergy Magazine is lucky to have the *Harry Potter Ultimate Editions 1 and 2* to giveaway.

Send an email with *Harry Potter* in the subject line to promotions@synergy-magazine.com and you might be lucky enough to win one !

You have from 19th November until 20th December to get your entries in. We will send out the prizes from the Synergy office to the winners prior to Xmas !

Synergy is the legal promoter of the competition and entry is only available from within Australia.

HEYDAY FILMS

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Kogan Blu-ray Player

KOGAN BLU-RAY BD 2.0 PLAYER FULL HD 1080P

Unleashing the True Potential of Full High Definition

I like the Kogan business model. Ruslan Kogan may be young but he has taken such a new approach to electronics he could be the new face of Australian ingenuity. Today most retailers sell "brand name goods" and this means that a product travels through a range of stages until it reaches the customer, each stage adds a further cost and worse, each stage puts the customer a stage away from input on what they really need from a given product. The Kogan model is direct retailing; goods are created in response from customer input, he deals one-on-one with the manufacturers and sells direct to the customer. There are no "middle men", quality control is kept tight and prices are kept nice and low. Rather than spending a vast figure on advertising (which would end up added to the cost of each unit sold), goods are sold via a simple website. Kogan's reputation has been enough to make the company and its founder highly significant in the Australian market.

A classic example of this new approach is with the Kogan Blu-ray player, it was originally released early in 2009 but only came with the Blu-ray 1.1 profile, it has now been updated to BD 2.0 BD-Live and also includes network support Ethernet and a USB port.

One of the things I find when I read reviews of the Kogan Blu-ray player is that people miss how truly revolutionary this product is and how surprising (and impressive) it is that it comes from Australia. There are very few players which allow region changing for Blu-ray and these are normally quite expensive. While multizone has become readily available for DVD, due to BD 2.0 BD-Live it is more tricky for Blu-ray and hence modded players are pricey. For an Australian firm to take the initiative and offer a well priced player which can play both DVDs and Blu-rays from around the world deserves recognition. Kogan has stood up against the "big boys" and created a product which is superbly priced, will give you access to the global market of DVDs and Blu-rays and which works like a charm, what more could you ask for ?

Let's begin by looking at the player itself. It is has the standard black and silver component design with the Kogan name imprinted on the top, ventilation holes and a blue Blu-ray logo on the front. It is straight forward but has a nice component look; it is light but fairly sturdy. It is 62 x 430 x 285 mm in size and weighs 3.4 kg.

The remote works well and is easy to operate with simple and clear keys and some extras such as resolution change on the remote.

The Kogan player offers excellent performance, it loads discs in a record time and compared to most Blu-ray players (even the PS3) seems to be lightning fast. It supports the newest Blu-ray Profile: BD-Live which, to be honest, doesn't mean a lot to me. At present it seems very much of a bandwidth waster as it simply offers wallpapers, gimmicky content and high definition trailers. That being said it is nice to have the latest profile and as bandwidth increases the usefulness of this system may also prove of increasing interest.

It is supported by an Ethernet port and a USB drive for storing BD-Live info. These are located on the front for ease of access; there is nothing worse than climbing around behind a component to put something in again and again.

The upscaling ability of the Kogan player is exemplary; it can take standard DVD's and turn them into true Hi Def picture quality. I have tested a range of upscaling players and while in theory I like the idea I still think you can't turn a "pig's ear into a silk purse" and the quality of the original film will define the outcome. Some films upscale better than others, but the idea is good and the result is certainly always better than a standard DVD in a standard DVD player without upscaling. In the Kogan player, the upscaling works very well and gives above standard results.

Something I have always liked in my technology is a menu system, it makes using the product easier and helps you get the most of it. The Kogan player includes a very easy to use menu which also offers the ability to change regions by inputing 9113 on the remote when the tray is open. Global cinema could not be easier !

The sound quality is excellent offering significant decoding on-board including Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio.

These days Blu-ray and DVD aren't the only formats and the player easily handles AVI and Divx format films. We tried a wide range of Divx titles (including Mkv the Hif Def Divx format) and it played them like a charm. Music wise it handles AC3, MP3 and AAC and will show JPEG, BMP and GIF picture files.

We tested the player with a wide range of DVD, Blu-ray and Divx titles and found it worked exceptionally well. While I have read reviews which suggested the player was a bit "fussy", we found it read DVD, Blu-ray and DVD-R titles and didn't reject a single disc. We found this to be same across regions. The picture quality was excellent, indeed quite superior really. Offering 24p playback on Blu-ray titles means that you really quite a bang for your buck with this player in terms of picture and with the various codecs, sound as well.

To be honest I cannot fault this player and when you consider the price, it is an absolute winner.

As a magazine we have examined various DVD players and none come even close in terms of matching quality with such a reasonable price. The combination of picture quality, sound, multizoning and price make this a winner.

Synergy Magazine is lucky to have a Kogan Blu-ray player to giveaway. The competition goes from 1st to 20th December with the player being shipped to the winner from us in time for Xmas.

Send an email with Kogan in the subject line to promotions@synergy-magazine.com and you might be lucky enough to win!

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News in Brief

The Nightmare Collection

The Nightmare Collection is nearing completion on a follow-up to its popular Indie horror shorts compilation series which saw Volume 1 hit the market to positive reviews. The DVD is a collection of some of the best horror shorts from around the world. They are introduced by a unique character called, Necro Nancy, played by the talented and beautiful actress and model Krista Grotte.

On the DVD the Nancy character is playing out a 'From Beyond the Grave' murderous storyline all her own while introducing the shorts to the viewing audience. This gives the viewers a voyeuristic type experience as seen through the lens of the accompanying cameraman as Nancy dispatches her victims between films. Not to mention it makes the cut scenes almost another horror short all their own.

Volume 1 gave us a solid group of films that included the stand out 'Don't Worry, It's Only Your Imagination' from F/X Wizard Bill 'Splat' Johnson. This film is just about a feature film with its 60 minute running time. It scared the pants off film goers when it was screened at The Saints & Sinners Film Festival in St. Petersburg, Florida. The reaction to that film is what got Festival Host Rick Danford to contact Mr. Johnson about creating a DVD collection that would include and showcase his film. Thus, The Nightmare Collection was born.

The Nightmare Collection Volume 1 DVD easily brought plenty of bang for the buck to the table as not only did it house almost 2 hours of horror shorts alone, but each film had a slew of additional materials such as Audio Commentary, Photo Galleries, Behind the Scenes Footage and so much more.

There was also some Necro Nancy Behind the Scenes material including a prequel comic that told the story of how her character came to be and left off where the DVD picks up.

Enigma Films is well into production with Volume 2 and looks to take the series to a whole new level. This time out Nancy is hitting the road with each scene providing a new location, set up and victim. The Producers promise a fun storyline and some very grisly and disturbing deaths along the way. The final couple of Necro Nancy cut scenes are currently being planned and then the DVD will be ready to plug in the shorts and extras to finalize.

A couple of the horror shorts to be included on the upcoming DVD are already being secured but Enigma Films is looking for a couple more films to add to the mix. If you have a quality horror short you'd like to have included on The Nightmare Collection Volume 2 DVD, or know of one you think would be a great fit, then you need to contact Rick Danford at rick@enigma-films.com as soon as possible. The Nightmare Collection series is a wonderful way to get you and your film the exposure you need as well as allow you to bring the whole film experience to life with added features for each film.

For more information on the Nightmare Collection series make sure to check out the Official web site at http://www.nightmarecollection.com.

The Final

Agora Entertainment and Final Fate Features is proud to announce that the official website for their horror movie, The Final, is now up and running. The website includes the film's trailer, a gallery of photos, synopsis and cast and crew information.

Written and produced by Jason Kabolati (*Pendulum*, *Mad Bad*) and helmed by first time director Joey Stewart, The Final stars Marc Donato (*Degrassi* TV series, *White Oleander*), Jascha Washington (*Big Momma's House 2*) and Julin (*Spirit Camp*).

The Final is a terrifying story that follows a group of high school outcasts who host a costume party and employ an arsenal of physical and psychological torture to avenge the years of humiliation and torment they suffered at the hands of the popular students. Shares director Joey Stewart: "*The Final is about being picked-on, bullied and tormented, and the retaliation and revenge that it incurs. As the outcasts begin to feel that life has no meaning, they make a pact for revenge and suicide that they believe will teach these kids a valuable life lesson. It's about what happens when people are pushed to the brink of despair, and the consequences the responsible parties must face*."

The website can be found at:
http://www.thefinalmovie.com

Nun of That (2010 Release)

Sister Kelly Wrath is a nun with a temper prolem. After being gunned down in an alley, she is selected by God to join The Order of the Black Habit, a group of supernatural vigilante nuns on a mission to rub out the mob. But first, Moses, Gandhi and Jesus have a few challenges up their sleeves for her.

Starring Sarah Nicklin, Debbie Rochon and Lloyd Kaufman (of Troma fame) as The Pope, *Nun of That* is shocking, hilarious, action-filled and a "*…balls-out riot full of hilarious comedy that will condemn your mortal soul to hell for all eternity… But it'll be worth it."* **CinemaSuicide.com**

Don't miss Sister Kelly Wrath and The Order of the Black Habit strip off their robes and kick butt for the Lord!

Nun of That - not for the politically or spiritually correct.

Alternative CInema
http://www.alternativecinema.com/index.php pg=si&item_id=1024

SCUM NATION

Nigel Wingrove, the director who found 15 minutes of notoriety when his short film 'Visions *of Ecstasy*' became the UK's first and only film to be banned on the grounds of blasphemy, and who then went on to found horror exploitation company Redemption Films and the Salvation Group and create Russell Brand's favourite all-girl collective, the *Satanic Sluts*, has decided to embrace scum in a big way!

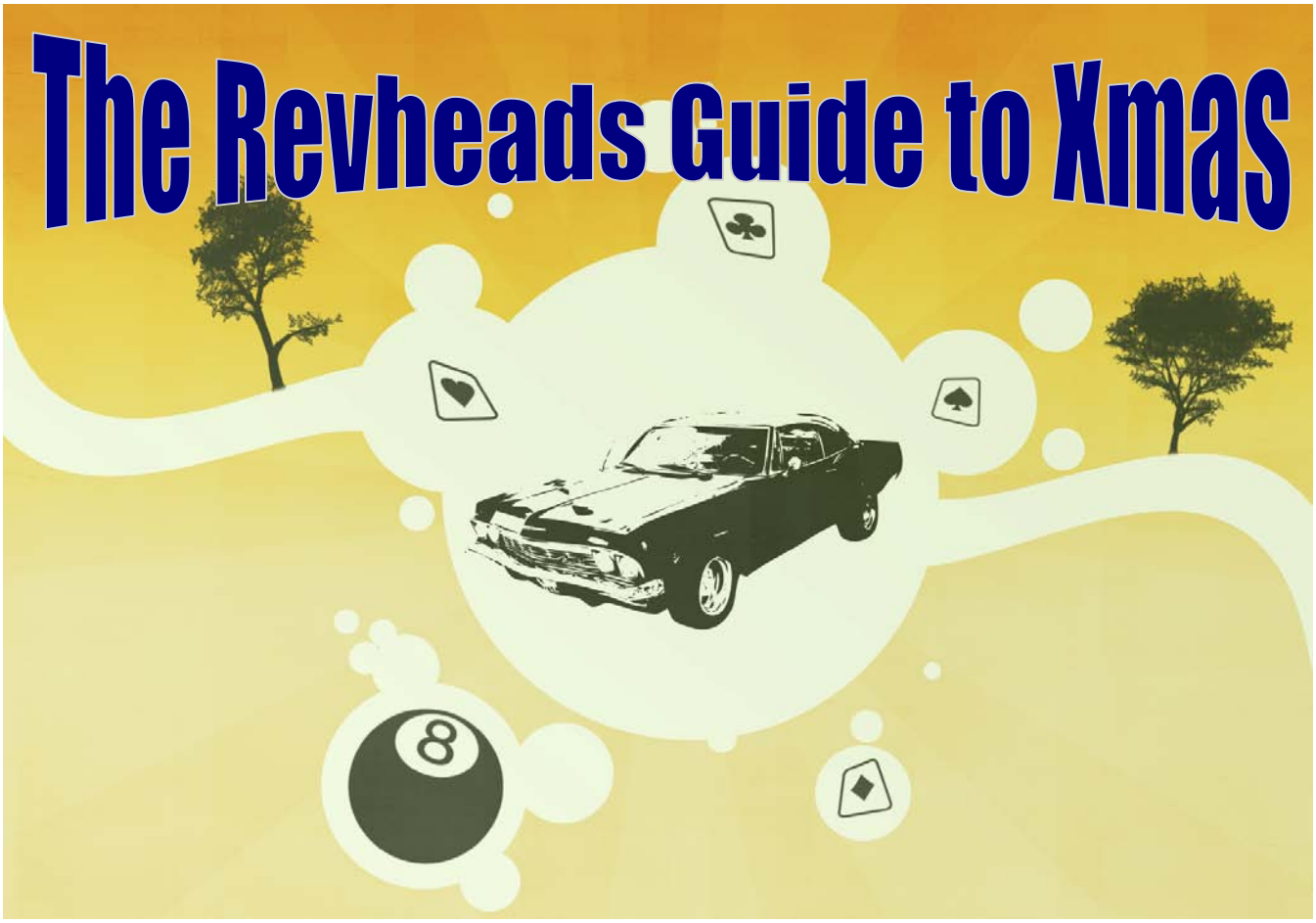
Called Scum Nation , Wingrove's new site is devoted entirely to all things Wingrove. This includes, not surprisingly for a man who was deemed to have 'outraged the divinity of Christ' and whose Satanic Sluts almost brought down the BBC, a great deal of provocative imagery and even more provocative words that, taken collectively, form the basis of his regular blog, Scum Nation . Attacking virtually everything that lives on the planet and espousing views that are not so much right-wing as death-wing, incorporating, as they often do, eugenics, sterilisation and capital punishment on a biblical scale! Wingrove's blogs are anything but dull and, if nothing else, will provoke a response.

Scum Nation now mixes all of Wingrove's verbal vitriol with his stunning imagery and has created a unique web-based arena into which humour, irony, film, irreverent politics, art and philosophy along with the bombastic, facile and offensive are all mixed together into one big cyber cauldron. The result: Scum Nation .

Scumnation.net has just gone live. Check it out.

Web: http://www.scumnation.net

The Revheads Guide to Xmas



Lately we have had a remarkable increase in the number of car-related books and DVDs coming out. Why? Is it possible that those of us who are now a little geriatrically disadvantaged want to look back on our younger days? Is it a reaction against the bland, boring cars available today? Has the sheer fun gone out of driving, regulated out in a series of anti-driver measures?

Here in New South Wales you can lose your license, your money or your car for spinning the wheels, for having your car stereo too loud, for driving too fast, for modifying your car too much or probably for having too loud a paint job. Some of this is well deserved as more people use the roads and thoughtless behaviour causes fatalities. A lot of it defies reason. We are constantly bombarded with the parrot cry "speed kills" but Jeremy Clarkson of Top Gear is living proof that it doesn't. Unfortunately. Now it seems that the biggest challenge you can enjoy in your car is to make your stereo louder. They actually have competitions over it! Poor kids.

The only customisation work they can do on their Toymazdabishi is change the colour of the numberplates.

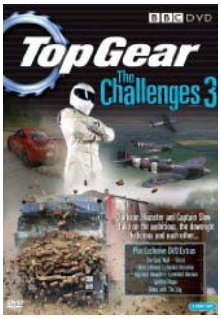
For those of us who like to drive an armchair now, let's see what would be nice for Christmas.

We can forget about a Lamborghini under the Christmas tree. It's going to be a bastard to wrap, it will scare the hell out of the cat and getting the Lambo back out again will involve some house redesign, probably unintended. No, it's not the car we want, it's the memories. To be able to relive those glory days when car brands looked different, petrol was fifty cents a gallon, we could do what we liked to our car, and we were immortal.

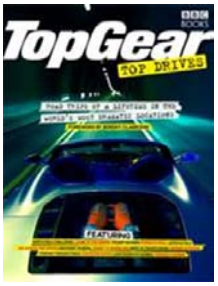
How about a TopGear DVD or book? It seems that every show the boys ever made has been released so there's plenty to choose from and some of the cars are pretty decent. My personal favourite of the DVDs is *The Challenges*, particularly the first which launched the Reliant Robin (almost) into space. There are three DVDs in all from the BBC, distributed in Australia by

Bob Estreich

Roadshow Entertainment. TopGear The Challenges was a celebration of Jeremy Clarkson and large amounts of money over common sense but it was *fun*. That's what annoys me about Jeremy Clarkson – he still gets to enjoy what I can only (vaguely) remember. *TopGear The Challenges 3* was released in November and included the Spitfire challenge, the Top Gear Awards and a great selection of rides with the Stig.



We also looked at a very good book, *TopGear – The Drives*, which was about taking your car somewhere different just for the pleasure of going for a drive. Such as along the Andes in a Ferrari.



The Big Book of Top Gear was a superb read and just looking at the pictures brought back memories of the TV shows.

At the same time the Top Gear Team don't just do cars, the Hamster (Richard Hammond) has also done an astounding job with *Engineering Connections*. (Madman Entertainment).

Richard Hammond's *Engineering Connections* is one of the best documentary series I have ever seen and this is no exaggeration. If there was a test to ascertain the documentary with highest concentration of content while still being great entertainment, Engineering Connections would win hands down. It is a deceptively simple yet ultimately satisfying package.

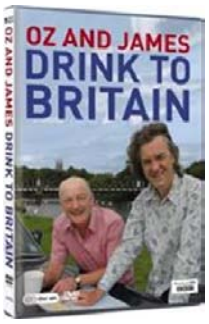
Take a piece of technology and use it as a "thematic device" to explore all the different technologies which have been used in its construction. Each technology is examined from historical, scientific and engineering perspectives and to stop our interest flagging include all manner of experiments, many of them of the "mad" TopGear type ! They haven't chosen The Hamster for nothing.

By choosing Richard Hammond the producers have really made a superb choice. Rather than having a dry lecture format where facts are pushed down the viewer's throats, we join Richard Hammond on a quest to understand these amazing structures.

The structures chosen are: the Airbus, the largest Airliner ever to exist; the Taipei Tower, one of the tallest buildings on Earth; the gigantic Troll A Platform and the strongest telescope ever made, the WM Keck Observatory. Each one of these awe inspiring achievements are used as gateways to explore all sorts of scientific, historical and technological achievements.

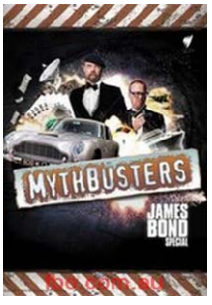
At the same time James May would not want to be overlooked would he ? *James May's Big Ideas* was released by the BBC via Demand DVD (R2) and as a 3-part series made by the BBC for its Open University project. James May presents a number of technological ideas from the past and investigates where they have got to in the present. The three main areas are transport (with an emphasis on personal transport), robotics and energy.

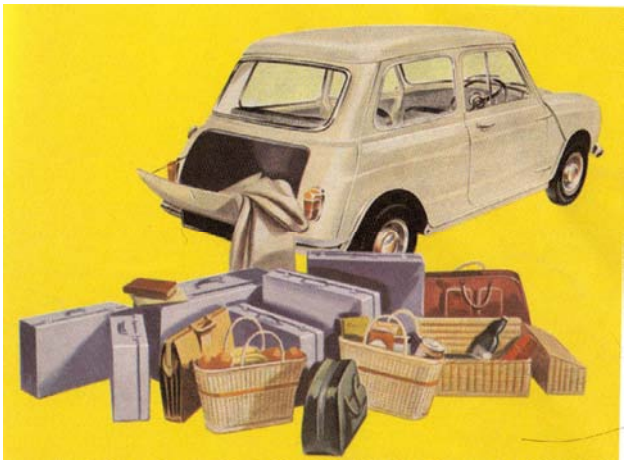
May also seems to like to mix drinking with driving with *Oz and James Drink to Britain* where James May and Oz Clarke ("International Wine Ponce" to James) cruise around Britain and Ireland in a Rolls Royce (naturally) towing a caravan, in search of a true British beer.



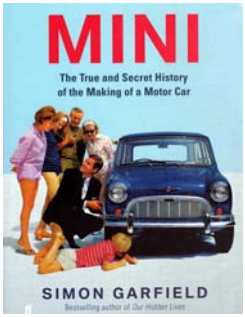
If, however, you would like to mix explosives with your driving, and who doesn't, perhaps you would prefer the Mythbusters special on cars?

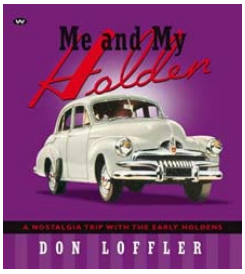
It comes in a twin pack of *Mythbusters – James Bond Special* and *Cars Special* and at least it didn't feature Jeremy Clarkson having a power orgasm. No, it featured an innocent if boring family car being brutally blown up. Twice.



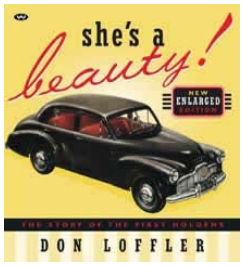


If nostalgia is your thing, you are well catered for this Christmas. The absolute top pick from my point of view was the book *Mini (*Simon Garfield, Faber and Faber, 2009), the story of the little Flying Brick, but if you are Australian you may prefer Don Loffler's *Me and My Holden* (Don Loffler, Wakefield Press 2009*).*





This book is dedicated to the first true Australian car, the 48-215 Holden and its later upgrade the FJ. So they lacked power, useful windscreen wipers and even comfort, but they got Australia on the road in a solid reliable car. Apart from the factory-built-in rust.

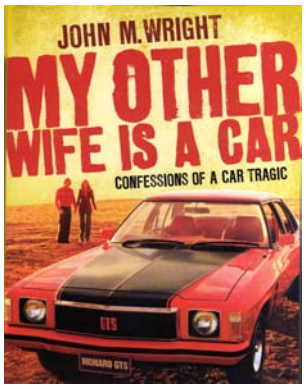


Loffler has also written many other books on Holdens, his personal obsession, including *She's a Beauty! The story of the first Holdens*, *Still Holden Together Stories of the first Holden model* and *The FJ Holden A favourite Australian car*. All from Wakefield Press.

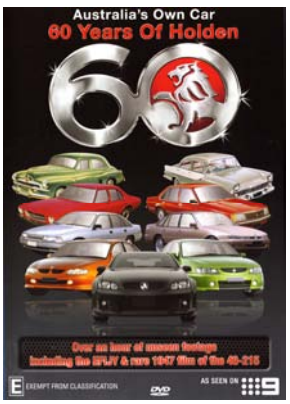
So maybe you never owned one of these classic cars?

You can still relive the feeling through other peoples' writing. A greatly underappreciated DVD is Eric Bana's *Love the Beast*. Eric's story of

restoring and racing a Ford Falcon GT in the Targa Tasmania shows that he is a true revhead and not afraid to share his feelings.



To see how bad it can really get, try *My Other Wife Is A Car*, a book by John Wright. Subtitled *Confessions of a Car Tragic*, it is a great read from a man who has owned more than 120 cars in 34 years and still can't make up his mind. His early days trying to get impotent little European cars to go faster is truly tragic, as were his experiences trying to get them to go around corners.

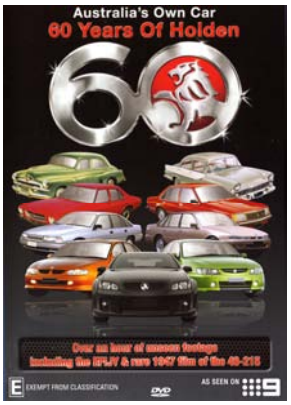


Just to top it off and just in time for Christmas we have a new DVD release – *Australia's Own Car – 60 Years of Holden*. It's reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Although on the surface it's a bit of fluff, it has everything to bring back the memories – commercials, the period look of long hair and hoon cars, and some stunning short documentary films.

So go ahead, make a nice cup of tea, tuck the rug around your arthritic legs and go off on a nostalgia trip. The kids will make snide comments about geriatric old farts and reliving your youth, but in the boring cars of today they will never know the pleasures of being a true revhead.

Australia's Own Car:
60 Years of Holden
2009
Viavision
Madman
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich



After World War 2 the Australian government decided Australia should have a car industry of its own. Up to then our cars were a mix of imports (mostly British) with some minor local assembly. The cars were completely unsuited to Australia's primitive roads. General Motors bought into Holden's, an Australian firm that made saddlery and body-work and did some local assembly. GM's engineers set out to design a car that was more suitable for Australia and could be built here. With Government assistance they made it happen. The first Holden rolled off the production line in 1948. Prime Minister Ben Chifley declared "It's a beauty" and the Holden became part of the Australian scene.

In fairness the car was mostly U.S.-designed, since there were no vehicle engineers or designers here yet. The U.S. staff did a good job with the Australian requirements. The first model known as the 48-215 (more commonly as the FX) was a roomy rugged reliable vehicle, basic but adequate for the time. This documentary traces the course of Holden cars through to the present day, introducing the cars and the personalities who were involved along the way. It also features the advertising which ranges from quaint to downright cheesy.

The show was made for TV so has a number of annoying "right after this commercial" breaks.

The restricted time also requires that a lot of good footage be left out. This makes the show seem a little superficial. Worst of all some of the favorite Holdens like the Torana GTR-XU1 and the EH barely rate a mention. The DVD makes up for this with a tremendous range of Extras. Since the show is a birthday party for the Holden it's only fair that it should leave out some of the early Holden's less desirable characteristics like pervasive rust, truly amazing body roll and an assembly quality that often had rattles in the car as it rolled off the production line. These problems were overcome with experience and the Holden of today is a far cry from that early FX.

My first Holden was an FC, the fourth model produced. It was spacious, sat well on the road due to its long wheelbase (it tended to trundle over the potholes rather than fall into them like a British car would) and did about ten miles to the gallon (of oil). It was reliable and gave me a feeling of independence and a liking for "going for a drive". My father opted for the later EK station wagon with its epic bodyroll. This poor vehicle had tail fins, a lot of extra weight, and the same elderly engine as my FC. It could be a bit of a struggle getting it to go sometimes, since the old "Grey" motor was showing its age.

One of my friends bought the later EH and it was a revolution. The new 186 cubic inch "Red" motor really made the car move and they got the styling far better. Gradually the Australian input and engineers were producing a better car.

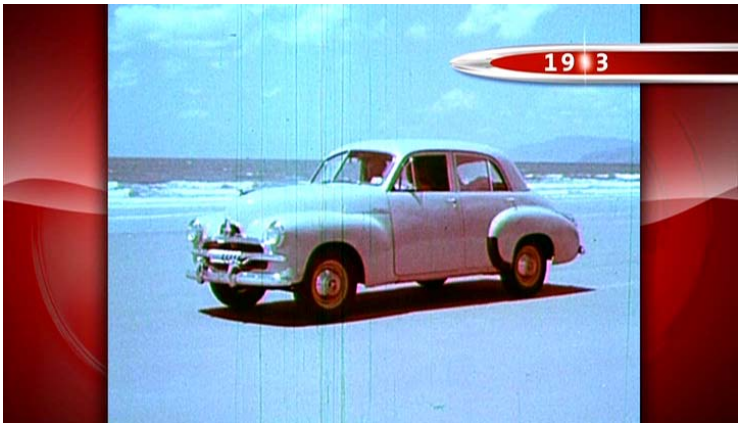
We are taken through some of the good ideas that Holden came up with, like the Sandman panel van aimed at the surfer crowd (also known as the "microwave oven"

because you could do a bird in twenty minutes). The mattress in the back was not a Holden option, but every Sandman seemed to have one anyway. They were often given names like “Mother’s Worry” that seemed quite appropriate. The G-Pak was a set of bolt-on extras that gave a family car a bit of a boy racer image.

One good idea that isn’t mentioned much was the Holden Torana. It was a smaller vehicle, originally a Vauxhall Viva from Britain. How it happened we don’t know, but Holden evolved this into a real car with good sporting capabilities. The best guess I can make is that a group of Holden engineers were sitting around in a mate’s garage one Saturday afternoon with a few beers and one said to another “you know, that car needs a better engine. I wonder could we drop a six-cylinder in there?” They could and did, although it meant extending the body, beefing up the suspension and brakes and a certain amount of trial and error along the “hold me beer and watch this” line. The resulting car was the Torana GTR, a seriously fun car. Then some inspired idiot decided that the engine needed reworking with a new cam, higher compression and triple carburettors and produced the XU1 engine. The Torana GTR XU1 was a winning combination and started to take serious control of the Bathurst 500 motor race, Australia’s leading 500-mile annual race for production cars. This is largely unmentioned in the documentary and it is a serious omission. Rust was no longer the Holden’s natural enemy – it was now the Ford Motor Company.

At least we get a good rundown on the launch of the Holden Monaro, the Torana’s big brother. This vehicle improved the sportiness of the family-sized car and was surprisingly popular, especially in its V8 version.

The Holden evolved to the point that it became exportable.

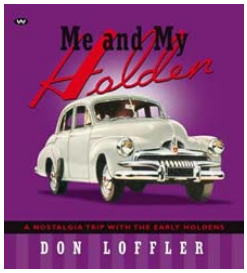


It was sold as far afield as South Africa where its ruggedness was just as much in demand as in Australia. We also look at the “ute” – the utility vehicle, with a passenger cab up front and a useful load tray in the back. It was strong, a useful size, and it quickly became the farmer’s friend.

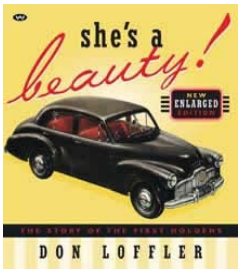
The Holden Commodore of today has come a long way from the 48-215 which is now prized by collectors. The Monaro version is being exported to the U.S. as a Pontiac. Its configuration is ideal for an increasingly fuel-conscious U.S. – more economic than a U.S. car, still plenty of space inside, better handling. For most of their models Holden left out the frills and non-essential extras in favour of just building a better car. This may disappoint Jeremy Clarkson but most Australians seemed to get by without satnav and automatic bum-heaters.

While the feature is necessarily brief the DVD more than makes up for this with the extras. There is a huge range of advertising jingles including the dreadful yobbo “football, meat pies, kangaroos and Holden cars” and the sickening “Holding you in my Holden”. There seemed to be an obsession in these ads with driving your Holden along a beach, which Holden owners would avoid like the plague because of the rust problems. There are many historical short films including the design and testing of the 48-215 in the U.S. in 1947 and later cars at Holden’s test track at Lang Lang in Victoria. One of the most interesting is the development process for the first Commodore.

The documentary at 109 minutes is a huge resource for Holden lovers. It will take you off on a nostalgia trip. GM-H is justifiably proud of their car and what it has become to Australia. This DVD is All-Region PAL format. Non-Australian users should make sure their equipment can display the PAL format correctly.



Interview with Don Loffler Author and Holden Fanatic !



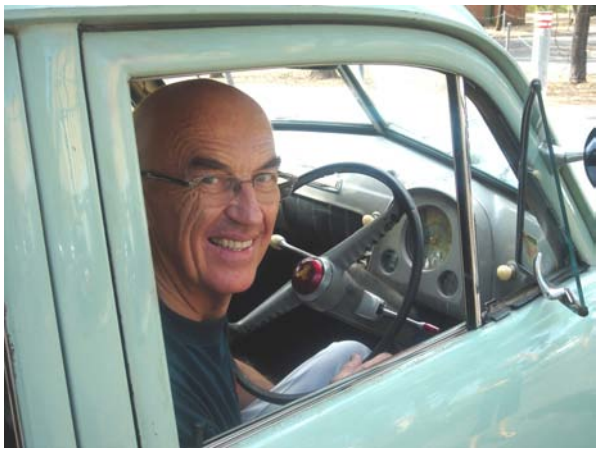


Photo Credit: Keith Loffler

Bio

Don Loffler is acknowledged as a leading historian of early model Holdens and the author of three other successful books on the Holden car, published by Wakefield Press: *She's a Beauty!, Still Holden Together*, and *The FJ Holden.* After years of being teased for never having owned a Holden, Don can at last hold his head high as the owner of his own 1953 48-215 sedan ('Glenda'). A retired teacher of Latin, chemistry and German, Don now devotes most of his time to his passion for Holdens. He lives in Adelaide.

Bibliography:

Me and My Holden:
A Nostalgia Trip with the Early Holdens
Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2008

The FJ Holden: A Favourite Australian Car
Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2002

Still Holden Together:
Stories of the First Holden Model
(New edition 2009)
Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2000

She's a beauty!: The Story of the First Holdens
Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1996
(New Edition 2006)

Interviewer Bob Estreich

You have shown us in your books why you love the earliest Holdens. Were there any other Holdens that come anywhere near as close in your affection?

No other models come quite as close in my affection, but I have a great liking for the EH Premier and the HR Premier station wagon with X2 motor.

Much of your information has come from like-minded collectors, but you must have had a lot of cooperation from GM-H as well. How easy were they to work with?

I have had great cooperation from GM-H. Their media relations people have been wonderful to deal with. They are well aware of the tragedy that happened in the 70s, when a large portion of their historic records were deliberately destroyed, and they are very appreciative of my efforts to record their history. I have been given the rare privilege of access to their photographic negative collection (what's left of it), and through spending countless hours ploughing through thousands of completely uninteresting negatives, I have been able to locate several hundred excellent shots for my books.

Some of the Holdens you have unearthed are quite rare and you have finally confirmed their existence as a production model only by going through the records.

Do you still encounter the "everybody knows...." syndrome and have to fight to confirm your beliefs by going deep into the archives? Do you still get a good feeling when you finally track down a rarity ?

Oh yes, the know-alls are out there, especially at car shows. I don't enjoy trying to put them right, and have to be very careful not to come across as a smarty-pants. Fictions still abound about the earliest Holdens, and they die hard, which is frustrating at times. But on the other hand, it's a great feeling to finally unearth the facts and present them to people who are open

to having the record set straight.

Your books are not only a celebration of the cars but recall the times as well. The advertising in the books shows an Australia far different to today. Where did you get all the wonderful period advertising?

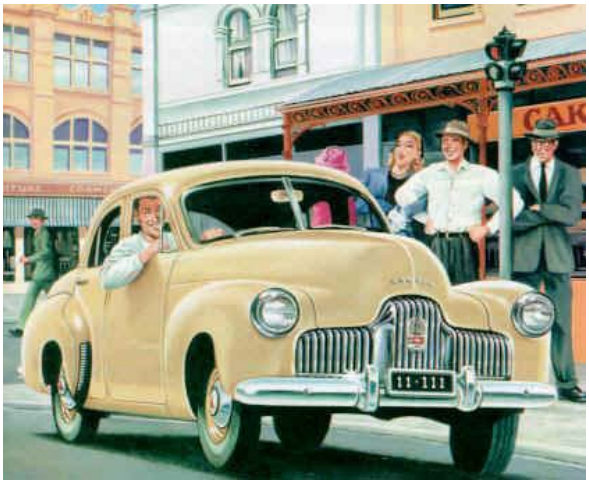
It's taken a long time to assemble them, one here, one there, rather like drip feed. Every time I get the chance to visit an antique shop, I ask for old magazines of the 50s, and occasionally a Women's Weekly or a Walkabout will turn up with some marvellous advertisement in it. Kind people have also given me photocopies of adverts.

In your books you don't leave out the weaknesses of the cars. Do owners prefer to only remember the good things about their Holden and gloss over the defects? Do collectors and owners give you a hard time over this?

No, the great majority are very frank about the defects, but at the same time very forgiving of them, because of their overall positive feeling about their Holdens. Occasionally you get someone who landed a lemon and, not surprisingly, they never bought another Holden.

The only time I really get flak is from diehards who can't cope with the 48-215 sedans and 50-2106 utilities being called FXs because the factory never called them that. It's so pathetic, because the very same people will cheerfully talk about Volkswagen Beetles. FX is a marvellous nickname, and now I have the last laugh, because I recently discovered that the FX nickname actually originated within GM-H!

Given that you have tracked down so many rare Holdens, are there any left that you haven't seen yet?



Yes, quite a few, mostly FJs. Among the FXs would be those painted in the experimental colour of San Pedro Ivory. Only six of them were produced in 1951. I've never heard of a surviving Department of Supply or PMG FX ute. Among the FJs would be a Special model painted 2-tone, with a light roof over a darker body. Virtually all 2-tone Specials were painted dark over light.

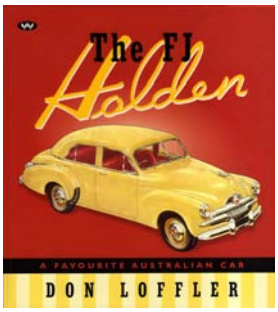
Although GM-H in theory offered seven different light over dark combinations, there was such buyer resistance that hardly any were produced, and I've yet to come across a survivor, even as a hopeless wreck. I've also never heard of surviving panel vans from the Army, Navy, RAAF and Department of Civil Aviation. So there's till plenty of excitement to come – perhaps!

I have to ask. What do you drive yourself? If it's an early Holden, what do your family and friends think about it?

After being mercilessly teased over the years for writing so much about the early Holdens and not having one myself, I finally acquired my heart's desire – a barn find. It's a July 1953 "Air Ride" (new suspension) FX which, after serving a family faithfully for 21 years, was laid up in a dusty old shed for 33 years, because they couldn't bear to part with it.

Finally, in 2007 they sold me their Glenn Green treasure, which I call Glenda. She's battle-scarred and far from perfect, but good enough that I can keep her original, paint and all. Mechanically, she's A1, which is a real bonus. My family and friends love her, and she often attracts more attention than the beautifully restored cars.

The F.J. Holden
Don Loffler
Wakefield Press



Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Don Loffler has done it again. Recently we looked at "Me And My Holden", a tribute to the legendary FX (48-215) Holden car that finally gave us transport that survived our atrocious roads in the post WW2 period. Now he gives us the next model in the Holden range, the FJ.

The FX was a popular car. It was solid, roomy, powerful for its day and inexpensive. It was cheaper and more reliable than the British and American cars that were being imported into our market, and for many years it satisfied the Australian motorist's needs. The FX was not without its problems, though, and it became obvious to the General Motors-Holdens executives that an upgrade was in order. They kept the body and that almost unbreakable engine but worked on the interior, trim and handling in an open-ended development intended to fix the FX problems and bring the car more up to date. They also explored different production models aimed at specific purposes like the panel van and taxi. The Ute (Utility Vehicle) remained in production since it had proved so popular in the FX range. It went on to comprise nearly a quarter of FJ vehicles as well.

The most noticeable feature was a new radiator grille that prospective buyers either liked or hated. Instead of the vertical-barred grille of the FX, the new one was described as "heavy...with buck teeth". In time, however, the FJ became just as accepted as its predecessor.

In July 1954 the Redex Around Australia Trial gave the new Holden a chance to show what it could do. Half the cars did not finish but Holden achieved a lower dropout rate than many other brands. The trial did highlight a number of areas that needed improvement, like handling on dirt roads, the dreadful 6 volt electrical system, and the low driving position for anyone under six feet tall.

The FJ was also the first Australian car to be exported to New Zealand and Don devotes a chapter to that country's motoring problems. He gives us some anecdotes from Kiwis that suggest that the FJ was just as popular there as in Australia.

The book goes onto describe the various models within the FJ range and their significant differences. The basic car could be optioned up with a range of accessories including mud flaps, bonnet mascots and more chrome. An important accessory was a steering wheel lock, since the FJ was very easy to break into and start.

Don moves on to the FJs of today. Racing or restoring or modifying, it seems an FJ owner has tried them all at some time. I well remember the "Battle of the FJs" races at my local speedway as these wonderful vehicles were reaching the end of their lives. I don't think I have ever seen a vehicle that rolled as well as an FJ.

The range of speciality models gets a lot of detail – some of these are incredibly rare and Don has managed not only to track many down but to find their background and history as well. The stories of the owners and how they found their cars is fascinating in itself, as is the difficulty of finding out just what your unusual FJ actually is – a coachbuilder's special? An owner-modified car? A previously unknown variant produced at the factory in small numbers? Don has had to become a detective to track down these rare vehicles from the unusual numbers on their builders plates.

Through the entire book we get many owners' stories, plenty of detailed photos and the usual magnificently-reproduced Holden advertising. Don also gives us a detailed chapter on each variant, what the builders plate numbers mean, the changes made to he FJ as it evolved and the colour schemes.

If you ever owned an FJ, if you are restoring one, if you just liked the look of them, then this is a book you must have.

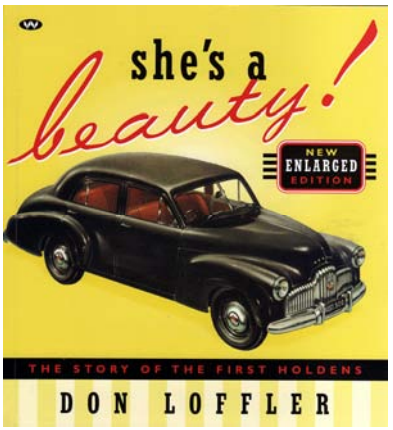
She's a Beauty
The Story of the First Holdens
Don Loffler
First published 1998
Reprinted and expanded 2009
Wakefield Press

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

This is the updated and expanded version of Don Loffler's original book on the classic 48-215 and FJ Holdens, Australia's first locally-made cars. Discovering and publishing the history of these seems to have become Don's life work and he manages to communicate the enthusiasm he has for the vehicles. His books are richly detailed, comprehensively illustrated and thoroughly researched.

In this reissue he tracks the history of General Motors in Australia and the story of Laurence Hartnett's enthusiastic attempts to get a car designed and built locally. Australia was a small market for General Motors and being pressured by Hartnett, their local managing director, did not sit well with the GM Board. It eventually cost Hartnett his job but the project went ahead.

The first Holdens were not an Australian design as we simply did not have the skills. Loffler describes the competing priorities between Australia and the US, the financial problems as Australia came out of World War 2, and the problems of setting up a production line style of manufacturing in a country that imported most of its cars from Britain in pack form and simply assembled them here. That General Motors – Holden succeeded in producing the car is a tribute to the vision of the men of the company and the politicians who helped. Left to GM we would have had another American design that would have been dropped into the market with little thought



for its suitability or otherwise. The success of the Holden concept decided the format of Australian cars for the next half a century and proved so successful that Holdens are now exported and rebadged to many countries including the U.S.

I was fascinated at some of the names suggested for the new car. We could have had a GMH Southern Commando, a Pangali or a Pargi – even a Canbra. Finally Harold Bettle, the current GM-H manager, decided on "Holden" to honour the family whose earlier negotiations had brought General Motors into Australia.

Loffler covers the story of the development and launch of the car, and does not try to cover up its defects. Like any new product, quality control was a headache and it took decades for GM_H to iron out problems of body panel fit, accurate machining of parts, electricals and quality of trim. They succeeded, though, and the public loved the car. It was just as well because it took years for manufacture to catch up with orders. Even advertising the car was a problem as newspaper was still rationed after the war.

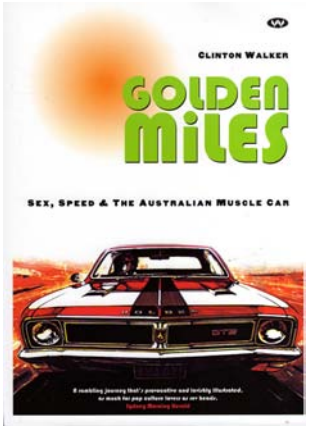
It wasn't until 1953 that the new look FJ was released, which is a tribute to the popularity of the old "FX" body style.

As usual Don includes chapters on "special " Holdens, rare models and the oddities that slip out from the factory from time to time. All these are well illustrated in the Loffler style with vast amounts of press material and photos.

He also includes a chapter on "Stories From The Production Line" which puts a human face on some of the thousands of workers who built the cars. There are all the statistics that you could possibly want, details of colour schemes and extras, the lot.

Subtle Hint: Christmas is coming. Do you know a Holden owner or fancier?

Golden Miles
Sex, Speed and the Australian Muscle Car
Clinton Walker
Wakefield Press
2009



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Now I am old and senile (according to my kids) I look back on my earlier motoring days and wonder what happened to the distinctive fun cars of my youth. Cars now are just a bland egg-shaped cocoon designed to protect the driver against everything including measles, but they are no fun and they have no style. Clinton Walker's book celebrates the last great truly individual cars, christened the muscle cars. It's not just a nostalgia trip for the old farts. Without these cars we may have taken much longer to see the benefits of disc brakes, fuel injection and decent handling work their way into mainstream cars. Many motor vehicle advances that we take for granted today came from the designers' attempts to get every last bit of performance from a muscle car.

They did not start out like this. The early ones were, to use Clinton Walker's words, "noisy, overpowered, underbraked, unsafe, gas-guzzling……". They had the traditional American design ideals of a big crude V8, extravagant tail fins and loads of chrome. In Australia the cars evolved. Our roads had many tight corners so handling became more important. Petrol was never as cheap as in the United States so we tended to go for smaller engines. The U.S. idea of planned obsolescence did not appeal to Australians so cars were built for a longer life. That meant less chrome, and so fewer places for rust to start.

The technology wasn't however, as important as the culture. These were not cars for middle

aged family men – they appealed to the new wealth of the younger generation and became sex symbols. Films like *Mad Max*, *Bullitt* and *Sunday Too Far Away* helped promote the image. The muscle car dominated the drive-ins on and off screen and even became a major subject for songwriters.

Walker follows the development of the first U.S. muscle cars from the early models made from bolt-on extras to the special designs like Ford's immensely successful (and sexy) Mustang. In Australia these cars needed a theatre to display their style and in the 1960s they found one – Bathurst's Mount Panorama racetrack, where the Bathurst 500 all-day production car race was held each year.

A long track with great downhill straights, a long hillclimb where power was important, and tight corners around the top of Mount Panorama, Bathurst had long been the domain of the little British sports cars like the Mini Cooper S and the Ford Cortina GT. The imported street muscle cars just couldn't handle the stresses imposed on them by a real race track, so the Big 3 manufacturers in Australia (Ford, General Motors-Holden and Chrysler) started developing their own. Since the major Bathurst race was for production cars each company had to

Doug Chivas charges ahead of a field of Falcons

sell at least 500 units to the public. They soon realized the tremendous advertising value in this televised race, and a win meant good sales for the rest of the year from the reflected glory.

The companies also quickly recognized that standard U.S.-based car designs just didn't stand up too well under the pressures of real racing. Slowing over a ton of car at the bottom of Conrod Straight was more than drum brakes could handle and in the mid-60s Holden introduced front wheel disc brakes. I remember a race in the 1970s when a well-meaning driver imported two Chevy Camaros with huge V8 engines just to compete in races. They had tons of "go" up the hill but at the bottom of Conrod the Camaros had absolutely no "stop". It was hilarious watching these huge cars trying to get round a 90 degree bend at ludicrous speeds – the cars still had drum brakes.

In 1967 the first home-grown muscle car, the Ford Falcon GT, won at Bathurst and the race between the Big 3 was on. Most young Falcon owners at least looked at their car and wondered how it would look dressed up as a pseudo-GT. In 1968 Holden released its competitor, the Monaro. This was Holden's first V8 muscle car and it had just one job – to take sales from the Ford Falcon by winning at Bathurst. From here on, Bathurst became more of a two-brand race with other models fighting it out for the minor placings if they were lucky.

Chrysler tried valiantly to keep up but without a V8 they were doomed to be always in the background. Even their hotted up Valiant Pacer was a straight-six family car with a flash paint job and bolt-on bits. It just failed to impress anyone.

Holden didn't help them by having a second go, this time with a smaller car. The Holden Torana

(a dressed-up Vauxhall Viva) was lengthened and in place of its toy British 4-cylinder motor a 161 cubic inch straight six was shoehorned into the engine bay. With sexy paintwork and a cheeky rear boot lid spoiler it was sold as the Torana GTR and successfully filled the gap as a poor man's muscle car. When Holden upgraded the engine to 186 cubic inches with a wild camshaft and triple carburetors into the XU1 version they had a serious Bathurst contender. The Torana GTR-XU1 was compact and nimble and became a winner in 1970. It also began the end of the Monaro as a race car. It was simply outclassed by its little brother. I sometimes drove a friend's XU1 and I was always surprised by how easy it was to handle around town and yet how its personality changed on the highway. It was practical, inexpensive, and the street racers loved it. It went a long way to redefining the muscle car for Australia's youth.

They accepted it cheerfully and this helped sell powered-up Japanese cars in later post-muscle car years.

For the traditionalists there was Ford's Falcon GTHO, a true beast of a muscle car. It was huge and intractable and designed in the old U.S. muscle car style. I drove one (once only) and around town it was, simply, terrifying. Even in the automatic transmission version there was no true sense of control – it either went like the clappers or stopped and rumbled at you. Just backing it out of the driveway had me worried. It was a bit like trying to negotiate the aisles of a supermarket in a bus.

The 1971 Phase III GTHO marked the end of an era. Reputedly the fastest four-door car in the world until the Jaguar XJ12 equalled it, it was killed by the wowser anti-speed brigade who got wind of Ford's plan to release an even faster Phase IV. It also came out that Holden was planning an XU2 Torana with a whopping 5 litre V8. In 1970 there were 3798 deaths on Australian roads and the Phase III was right in the middle of the controversy. Never mind that it was probably safer than most of the cars in the fatal crashes. Never mind that many crashes were fuelled by alcohol or pathetic roads or fatigue or sheer stupidity.

The cry "Speed Kills" was heard throughout the land even though it defied the reality. Scared of the bad publicity the Big 3 announced their retirement from car racing and muscle cars and went back to making family cars. The one most relieved was Chrysler, whose Charger R/T muscle car had cost buckets of money and failed to do anything for the ailing company.

The unhappy one was British Leyland who had just released their P76, an Australian-designed muscle car designed to take them into the league of the big boys. With a few more years of development it could have done it, but it was

simply the wrong car at the wrong time.

Rising world oil prices and anti-pollution regulations put the final nails in the muscle car's coffin, even in the U.S. The technology lived on but cars were now becoming more sophisticated thanks to the Japanese "rice rockets". You could buy a Nissan Skyline GT that was nearly as fast as a muscle car but didn't frighten the wowsers as much. Gradually the high performance Japanese cars took over the market, and so did bland design and safety-consciousness. Where once a car was rated on how economic it was or how well it handled and braked, now it is rated on how many airbags it has. Mediocrity is the goal.

The old advertising idea of draping a pretty girl over the car seems to have disappeared. It's hard to make an egg look sexy.

Clinton Walker has given us a comprehensive examination of the short-lived muscle car phenomenon and its effect on our culture. Reading this book has brought back many memories for me, and even a certain sadness that the muscle car days are over. Or are they?

The V8 has been gradually creeping back into the cars by stealth, although in a more fuel efficient, environmentally safer way. The release of a new Holden Monaro was a risky move for the company but it is now being rebadged and sold back to the U.S. Even Top Gear's drivers seem to enjoy it. Without the loud paintwork and hoon image, perhaps the muscle car can once again appear on our roads and fight off the great grey blandness that is modern motoring.

Golden Miles may help. Way to go, Clinton!

A Very Trashy Christmas!

Christmas, for many, is a time of celebration, religious festivities and family get-togethers. For others it is a dismal holiday of boredom, inane festivities and superstitious fervor. Christmas supposedly celebrates the life of a 2,000 Palestinian who, if he existed at all, would have been born in September, though the subject is hotly debated. It was only in 336 A.D. that the Church of Rome chose December 25th to be the birth date of Jesus and this was to compete with the pagan celebration of the Saturnalia and the birth date of Mithra, Sol Invictus, a popular sun god of the time.

The story of how Jesus became related to Santa Claus is also a fascinating one. Santa Claus is a sanitized version of the old god of winter whose celebrations were held at the Winter Equinox around December 25th. It should also be noted that the earliest record of a tree being decorated in a Christian celebration for Christmas was in 1521 in the Alsace region of Germany.

It is even more fun to reflect how Santa was originally the horny wild God of the Forest, Herne the Hunter (related to Pan) and how he has a naughty little helper who belted kids who misbehaved ! In early Dutch tradition Saint Nicholas brings gifts to good children, while bad children are knocked around by Black Pete, who brandishes a broom-like rod.

In Germany, Saint Nicholas' Dark Helper is a swarthy, horned, frightening little man, always brandishing the besom. He is known by many names: Knecht Ruprecht (servant Ruprecht), or in Bavaria, Pelz Nickel, meaning 'fur-clad Nick.' In Tyrol, the picture is even clearer; there the Dark Helper is Kllaubau, a scarier version of the British Herne the Hunter, a chained, furry, black -faced horned creature"

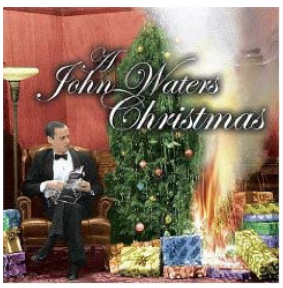
When Santa Was a Shaman: The Ancient Origins of Santa Claus & the Christmas Tree.
Tony van Renterghem

So if someone tells you we should remember the “true meaning of the season”, you should remind them that the original meaning of Christmas involved wild orgies, celebrations and worship of the wild horned god of winter.

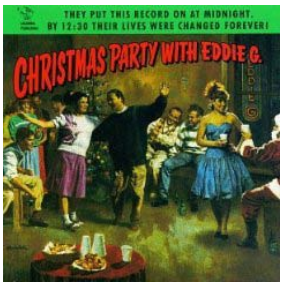
So if we do away with both the retail driven commercial excess of the season and wild ravings of irrational preachers, then what can we replace it with ? Last year we explored the tradition of horror Christmas cinema bringing “murder and mayhem” to the family getaway. This year we thought an examination of the trashy side of Christmas may be fun, and since music is so central to the Christmas experience we have decided to focus on the strange world of Christmas music, so let’s buckle our seatbelts and enter the world of Xmas thrash.

Have a merry, rotten, scary, sexy, biracial, ludicrous, happy little Christmas
John Waters

The best place to start is with the king of Trash, John Waters and what better a compilation than *A John Waters Christmas* (New Line Records 2004). This is the ultimate Christmas music collection. We have a rocky Xmas song *Fat Daddy* open-



ing the CD and then the nasal whining of the master of the emasculated sound Tiny Tim with *Rudolph - The Red Nosed Reindeer*. There is *Happy Birthday Jesus* which is so sickly sentimental you will want to throw, *Sleigh Ride* by Alvin and The Chipmunks, a Black Power Christmas anthem in *Santa Claus is a Black Man* and a Theremin orchestrated Christmas tune in *First Snowfall*. There is so much to admire in this truly trashy Christmas CD !



Christmas Party with Eddie G (Columbia, 1990) is now out of production, but copies can be found second hand. Who the hell is Eddie G ? Eddie Gorodetsky is a shadowy presence darting about the entertainment industry. An Emmy Award-winning writer, his work can be seen on SCTV, Letterman, Saturday Night Live, The Comedy Channel, and assorted Penn & Teller shows. Each year, Eddie plunders perhaps the world's largest collection of yuletide recordings to craft his Christmas tapes. Privately circulated up 'til now, these tapes have become legends in the show biz community. Various CDs can be found of his titles and these are truly bizarre celebrations of Xmas music. They include celebrities singing Christmas songs (who shouldn't), poems, rare Xmas music and strange comedy adverts and interjections.

American Song-Poem Christmas (Bar/None Records 2003) continues the rare and hands-on approach to Trashy Xmas music. So what are Song-Poems? Song-Poems were what we would call "vanity-publishing" today.

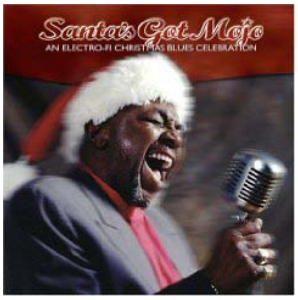
They were primarily a product of the Seventies and Eighties when people could send in their lyrics for a song they were sure would be a hit and the company would get their "on-staff" musicians to record the song and second a limited pressing back to the writer, for a fee of course!

This collection is truly frightening, from *The Rocking Disco Santa Claus* to *Santa Came On a Nuclear Missile*. These were songs that should never have been recorded at all, never mind have been re-released for prosperity on CD !

At the same time Christmas shouldn't be all jolly so what about *Bummed Out Christmas!* (Rhino / Wea 1989) which offers such upbeat numbers as *Santa Claus Came Home Drunk*, *Christmas Eve Can Kill You*, *Christmas in Prison* and *Don't Believe in Christmas*.

We now reach a cross roads in Christmas music, so before we get into Christmas comedy, we should examine the strange habit of recording Christmas songs in every different musical form. Why do people believe that sappy Christmas songs suddenly become trendy and hip when played using other instruments is beyond me..

These strange and eccentric album are enough to drive you to shoot your family and then yourself, so be warned they are a risk to your sanity !



We can open with *Rhythm & Blues Christmas* (Ace Records 2006) and *Rockabilly Christmas* (Buffalo Bop, 2000). I mean who hasn't wanted to hear *Mama's Twistin' With Santa*, *Jingle Bells Boogie or I Wanna Spend Christmas With Elvis*. Then there is bluegrass Christmas music with *Must Be Santa! The Rounder Christmas Album* (Rounder, 1995), Blues Christmas music with *Genuine Houserockin Christmas* (Alligator Records 2003) and *Santa's Got Mojo!* (Electro-Fi Records 2002). There are so many others it is scary, *Cajun Christmas* by Jo-EL Sonnier

(Green Hill 2002), *Christmas Gumbo* (Flambeau, 2004) and who can forget Boogie best illustrated with *The Christmas Album* by Canned Heat (Fuel 2000, 2007) – they even brought the Chipmunks along for a track !

Of course you can also expect the obvious such as *A Swingin' Christmas with Tony Bennett* (Sony 2008), *What A Night! A Christmas Album* Harry Connick Jnr (Sony 2008) etc etc. I can hear you say, "Mummy, Mummy make it stop", but no there's more…

Rockers also seem unable to resist the Christmas fever too with *Christmas with the Smithereens* (Koch Records 2007), *Merry Christmas and Happy New Year* Jimi Hendrix (Re-release MCA 1999) and way to many others.

But rather than spending money on individual atrocities, why not get *Classic Rockin Christmas* (Koch, 2004), it is still available and has a motley crew of rockers singing Xmas trash. The Kinks do *Father Christmas*, Pat Benetar does *Please Come Home For Christmas* and George Thorogood & The Destroyers do *Rock and Roll Christmas*.

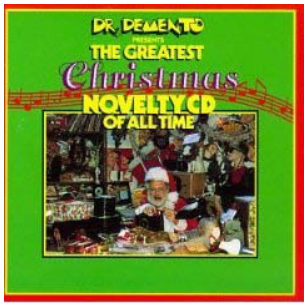
Sadly there are lots of other Rock Christmas compilations, another example will suffice *A Classic Rock Christmas* (Sanctuary 2002) with such wondrous hits as *I Believe in Santa Claus* Reo Speedwagon, *All I Want* Styx and *Everybody Loves Christmas* by Eddie Money.

However, if you want your music heavier, there is *We Wish You a Metal Xmas...and a Headbanging New Year* (Eagle Records 2008) – which features Dave Grohl (Foo Fighters), Geoff Tate (Queensryche), Ronnie James Dio, Lemmy, Alice Cooper, Billy F. Gibbons (ZZ Top) and George Lynch (Dokken).

What were they thinking ? It must be popular because there is a new metal album planned for Xmas, creatively named *Metal Christmas* with a range of top Metal stars already on-board. There are lots of obscure metal Christmas releases as well including such joyful tunes as the single by Austrian Death Metal *A Very Brutal Christmas* and *T'Was the Night of a Helish Xmas* by Helstar (Metal Blade 2000).

One of the classics is *No Presents for Christmas* by Satanist King Diamond (*Fatal Portrait* Album, Front Runner Records 1986)

Enough already, any more Christmas music and I will go postal. So what else can we enjoy for Christmas, some comedy may be nice for a change.



Dr. Demento Presents: Greatest Christmas Novelty CD (Rhino / Wea 1989) is a real gem. Dr.Demento is known throughout the U.S for his weekly two-hour radio festival of mad music and crazy comedy.

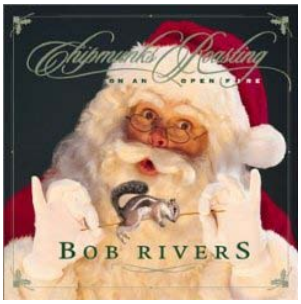
This selection brings together truly weird and obscure comedy Xmas songs including Cheech & Chong's dope inspired *Santa Claus and His Old Lady*, *Grandma Got Run over by a Reindeer* and dogs singing *Jingle Bells* ! Another good title from Dr. Demento is *Holidays in Dementia* (Wea, 1995)

Bob Rivers is a well known American rock and roll radio personality whose program The Bob Rivers Show is broadcast on Seattle rock station KZOK-FM.

He is a prolific writer of parody songs and has released many albums. His Christmas albums are irreverent, bizarre and incredibly funny; they are also extremely musically talented.

I Am Santa Claus (Wea 1993) is one of his most classic Xmas albums including such gems as *A Letter of Santa*, *Jingle Bells Hells*, *Didn't I get This Last Year* and many others.

Other Christmas albums by Rivers include *Twisted Christmas* (1992), *More Twisted Christmas* (1997), *Chipmunks Roasting on an Open Fire* (2002), *White Trash Christmas* (2002).

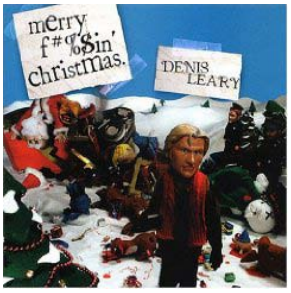


Rivers has also produced a plethora of comedy albums with amazing parodies and exceptional humour. Visit: http://www.bobrivers.com/

If you prefer your comedy dirtier, then you can't go past *Pull My Finger: Jingle Smells* (Oglio Records 2005) with such high brow songs as *The 12 Farts of Christmas*, *Soil The Halls*, *Silent Butt*, *Deadly Night*, *Auld Gas Sine*, *Smells to the World* and, of course, *Jingle Smells*.

This line seems popular as it is also subject of a hit in the U.S called *I Farted on Santa's Lap (Now Christmas is Gonna Stink for Me)* by The Little Stinkers (1999).

Other classic singles including *Merry Fuckin' Christmas* by Dennis Leary (2004) and don't forget Kevin Bloody Wilson the bawdy Aussie comedian who has released some sixteen albums. He has also been nominated four times for Best Comedy release in the Australian ARIA Music Awards. His website includes all sorts of information about his many albums and hit songs and shows. (http://www.kevinbloodywilson.com.au)



His has written various Xmas songs including *Santa was Stoned* and a song which includes some of the most insightful and touching Xmas lyrics ever penned *Hey Santa Claus*.

This song is found on various of his CD releases including the *20 Years of Kev CD Set* and an animated video is on the *Karaoke Kev* DVD.

I think we can end this exploration of Trashy Xmas music with just a small except from the moving and deeply inspirational lyrics of *Hey Santa Claus*.

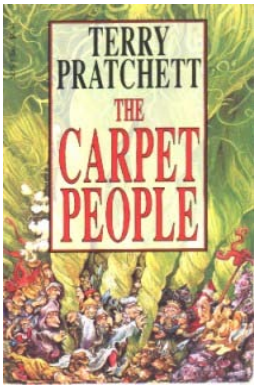
Hey Santa claus you cunt!
Where's me fuckin bike?
I've unwrapped all this other junk and there's nothing that I like.
I wrote you a fuckin letter and I come to see you twice
Ya worn out geriatric fart, you forgot me fuckin bike.
If I wanted a pair of bloody thongs, I'd have bloody asked.
And this cowboy suit and ping pong set you can shove right up your arse!
You've stuffed me bloody order up
It's enough to make you spew
And I'm not the only one who's snakey
Me sisters dirty too!

(female voice)
Hey santa clause you cunt!
Where's me fuckin pram?
You promised me you'd bring me one, you remember who I am.

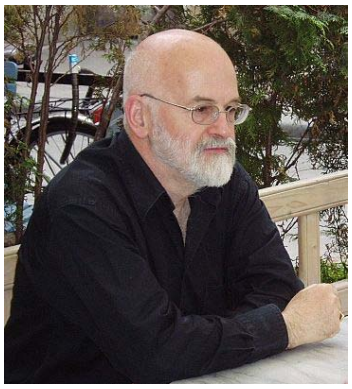
'Cause I'm the little girl who you made sit right on your hand
I'll give you fuckin ho ho ho
You forgot me fuckin pram….

Terence David John Pratchett was born in 1948. He has become a master of the British comedy fiction / fantasy genre. He was Britain's best-selling writer during the 1990s and he is still regarded as their second most-read author. He was awarded an OBE for services to Literature in 1998 and was knighted in 2009. Currently his book sales have run to more than 55 million copies in 36 languages. The books have been adapted to stage, film, animated cartoons and illustrated novels.

He is now suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's Disease which will eventually affect his writing. This is therefore an appropriate time to review his work and examine just what makes him such a favorite with so many readers.



Pratchett's first novel was *The Carpet People* published in 1971. This book described a flat world inhabited by a tribe called the Munrungs. It is a story of mindless tradition versus enquiring minds and some of the themes such as the flat world later reappeared in another novel, Strata, and ultimately in the Discworld series. He followed up *The Carpet People* with *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976) and *Strata* (1981), refining his technique as he went. His writing is typically British humour – understated comedy abounding in puns, surprise twists and unforeseen outcomes. One of the best parts of his writing is the use of extensive footnotes. If a comment in the book is worth developing he will do this in a footnote, sometimes carrying the concept to bizarre lengths.



".. the fastest animal on the Disc is the extremely neurotic Ambiguous Puzuma which moves so fast it can actually achieve near-light speed in the Disc's magical field. This means that if you can see a Puzuma, it isn't there. Most male Puzumas die young of acute ankle failure caused by running very fast after females who aren't there and, of course, achieving suicidal mass in accordance with relativistic theory"

His style proved very popular. In 1987 he gave up his day job as Press Officer for four nuclear power stations and concentrated exclusively on his writing. This turned out to be a good move and the early books, the characters and the by-now well developed subtle sense of humour all came together in what became his most popular work, the Discworld novels.

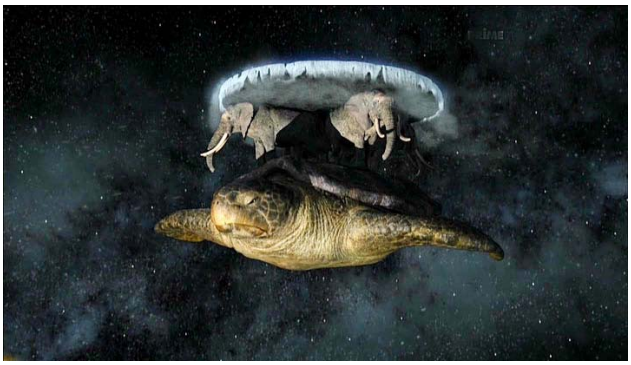
For the inspiration for his books, Pratchett draws heavily and ruthlessly on mythology, superstition, history and famous people. Noone is safe from his lampooning. His characters are

Bob Estreich

beautifully drawn if not always quite "right" (such as Captain Carrot, the six foot dwarf). The situations they find themselves in often echo history in a way that particularly seems to ridicule the British upper classes. The main characters are rarely upper class, in fact Lance Corporal "Nobby" Nobbs of the Night Watch actually has a doctor's certificate to say that he is, really, human in spite of the evidence.

The sly humour, the puns, the beautiful if malicious use of the English language to ridicule itself are all there. Pratchett is a master wordsmith, but subtle. I was reading one of his short stories, *Hollywood Chickens*, about a group of chickens stranded on a roundabout. The story deals with their attempts to get off the roundabout and to the safety of the woods on the edge of the highway. I was about halfway through when I realised I was reading a parody of the old "Why Did The Chicken Cross The Road?" joke.

"And they are correct. The Universe clearly operates for the benefit of humanity. This can be readily seen from the convenient way the sun comes up in the morning, when people are ready to start the day."



The first Discworld novel, *The Colour of Magic* (1983), introduced the concept of a flat planet resting on the back of four gigantic elephants, themselves carried on the back of the Great A'Tuin, a spacegoing turtle. On Discworld the laws of physics as we know them are replaced by magic. The urban centre of the Discworld is the city of Ankh-Morepork, based heavily on medieval London. It is run by the Patrician who manages a careful balancing act between those who would rather be in power and those who prefer things as they are.

The magical centre is Unseen University in Ankh-Morepork, where an inept student wizard named Rincewind is about to be expelled. He meets Twoflower, a naive but exceedingly rich man from the Agatean Empire (a thinly disguised China / Japan). Twoflower is the Discworld's first tourist. He is also an insurance salesman and introduces the larcenous citizens to the concept of insurance. The story opens as Twoflower and Rincewind are escaping the blazing city. Unfortunately Twoflower forgot to mention "arson" in his sales spiel. The citizens had no trouble at all with the concept. Rincewind is the unifying character through the Discworld series. In most of his appearances he is running away from something / someone intent on killing him. Although he has the knack of attracting trouble he also has the knack of staying alive quite successfully. Sheer cowardice helps him here.

Many other characters come and go through the stories. Often Pratchett would like a character enough to continue them through further books, so we have repeat appearances by the witches, Sam Vimes, the Patrician, Constable Carrot, and especially Death.

A brief rundown of some of the characters is probably in order.

The Witches

Granny Weatherwax is your traditional witch – stern, knows her work well, lives alone in the forest, and is supremely self-confident in her abilities. She prefers to use "headology" rather than magic. Her best friend is Nanny Ogg, a friendly village witch with a huge extended family that she rules ruthlessly. She is the one you call when your wife is having trouble delivering a baby. She knows all the verses to the song "The Wizard's Staff Has A Knob On The End" and makes an apple scumble that can dissolve granite. Maigret is a modern witch, in touch with nature and all things living.

She is regarded as a bit of a wet hen by Granny Weatherwax but is capable of remarkable surprises when her magic is called on (such as when breaking out of dungeons).

Sam Vimes

Captain of the Ankh-Morepork City Guard's Night Watch. An old fashioned copper, he shows no fear or favour (he once arrested the Patrician and lived to tell the tale). He has turned the Night Watch into an efficient multi-species force in which he has included a were-wolf, dwarves, a zombie and even a vampire. And, of course, "Nobby" Nobbs.

"It was said that life was cheap in Ankh-Morepork. This was, of course, completely wrong. Life was often very expensive; you could get death for free."

Captain Carrot

Can a six foot dwarf (the rightful King of Ankh-Morepork) and a werewolf (Constable Angua) find love? Carrot is naive, knows everyone in the city, and is respected by them, but he is at a complete loss about women. Although Angua is fond of Carrot she is also somewhat in awe of him. In the background there is always the species problem – when a werewolf is having a bad hair day everyone's going to be sorry.

The Luggage

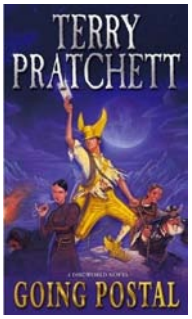
The most homicidal character in English literature. Many years ago during the great magicians' wars bolts of random magic struck parts of the Discworld. Anything that later grew there developed odd magical characteristics. The Pear Tree, particularly, tended to develop intelligence. This carried on when the tree was felled and turned into valuable items like a wizard's staff.

The Luggage is a travellers trunk made entirely of sapient pearwood. It will follow its owner (currently Rincewind) to the ends of the earth or further, but if its owner is threatened its murderous tendencies quickly come into play. It travels around on dozens of little feet and the pitter patter of tiny feet is often the last thing heard by a would-be assassin.

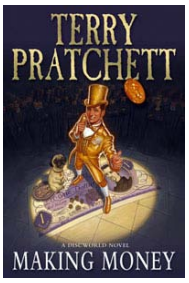
There is a lovely description in one of the books of Rincewind lazing on a tropical island beach while the Luggage drags maneating sharks from the lagoon and eats them. This naturally comes as something of a surprise to the maneaters who thought THEY were at the top of the food chain.

The Patrician

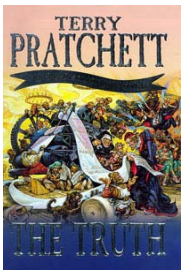
Runs Ankh-Morepork. He could probably be a very cruel man but nobody is quite game to test this. He has not had to use the Scorpion Pit for many years, which is just as well – the scorpion has died of old age.



Instead he prefers to take a criminal and put him in charge of an ailing public enterprise like the Post Office or the Mint. (*Going Postal* (2004) and *Making Money* (2007)). His biggest problem is when the magic-oriented traditional methods of Ankh-Morepork collide with modern technology such as the printing press (*The Truth*, 2000).



He also has trouble with Sam Vimes, who keeps trying to do the Right Thing and therefore causes political friction in the city. Vimes' total disrespect for the upper classes is useful to the Patrician – while Vimes is keeping them stirred up or nervous the Patrician can get on with running the city without having to worry about those who think they could do it better.



Cohen the Barbarian

Discworld's oldest surviving hero. Although he and his Silver Horde are now well past the maiden-ravishing stage, they have continued to loot and pillage the Discworld because they don't know how to do anything else. Like die.

They are, however, quite happy to teach others how to die. Rincewind is on cordial terms with Cohen. The one thing Cohen doesn't want to do is die in bed.

The Librarian

Of Unseen University. He is actually an orangutan, following a magical accident. Finding his new form very convenient for working through the stacks, he has resisted all attempts to change him back. The University has now accepted his new form and it must be said that a Librarian who works for bananas has certain cost advantages. He resents being called a monkey. If you want to keep your arms in their conventional location, it is best to remember this.

Death

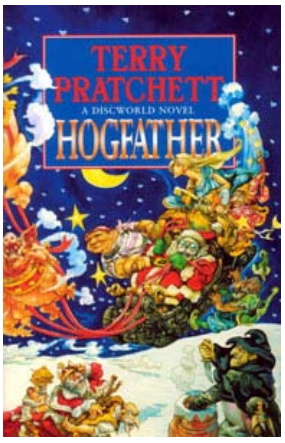
Traditional black-robed skeleton with glowing eye sockets. Death SPEAKS LIKE THIS (said to be like two cement blocks rubbing together). He has appeared in every Discworld novel but one, and is a favorite with readers. You just know he's going to turn up eventually in the book and half the fun of the novel is working out when. He is not actually evil - in fact, at the very end, he will always be there for you. Witches and Wizards can see him, talk to him and summon him. He will personally collect them when their time is up. He is fascinated but baffled by humans and a number of Discworld books are based on his attempts to understand them. He has a niece, Susan Sto-Helit, who is sometimes called on to reluctantly take his place. He also has a white horse, Binky (because it's a nice name). Although Death incorporates all the other Deaths for all other creatures, somehow the Death of Rats (the Grim Squeaker) was missed out and is now his constant companion. Sometimes they are accompanied by Quoth, the raven, a bird of revolting eating habits and a preference for eyeballs. Death is fond of kittens, as anyone who drowns them will find out.

"Humans are fascinating. In a Universe full of wonders, they have invented Boredom"

There are so many other wonderfully-described characters in Pratchett's work that it is hard to pick favourites. Perhaps YouBastard the camel who can do advanced mathematics in his head? Grebo, Nanny Ogg's cat (he's just an old softie, really) who has fathered most of the cats in the village and is so vicious that wolves avoid the area? Mustrum Ridcully, the ArchChancellor of Unseen University whose sporting habit of firing his crossbow at the Bursar has led to that gentleman's serious nervous condition? Perhaps Detritus the Troll of the Night Watch who is excused from saluting because he keeps knocking himself out?

The Discworld series has spawned plays and animated films. In the 1997 animated films *Wyrd Sisters and Soul Music*, Christopher Lee did the voice of Death. In 2006 Sky One finally produced a live action and CGI version of *The Colour Of Magic*. This was generally a close copy of the original book, well visualised and beautifully acted.

Those fans who hoped it would lead to further Discworld films were ecstatic when *Hogfather* was released by Sky One as a two-part TV series over Christmas 2006. *Hogfather* is a take on Father Christmas in a way, but it is not the fat jolly Santa Claus that we know. The Hogfather is the current incarnation of the ancient, brutal dark god of midwinter – the one who must shed blood each winter so the sun would return. A full-length film was released the following year.



After a while Pratchett settled down to producing two books a year. The Christmas edition was traditionally a Discworld novel, while the midyear book (often in collaboration with other authors) set out to explain some of the Disc's peculiarities. So we got - *The New Discworld Companion, The Art of Discworld*, *The Science of Discworld* (three books*), A Discworld Mapp* (two books) and *Where's My Cow?* (young Sam Vimes Junior's favourite bedtime book).

Many of these were written in collaboration with Paul Kidby, Stephen Briggs, Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen. Although the books tend to spend more time explaining the Disc's oddities they also carry plotlines which are classic Pratchett.

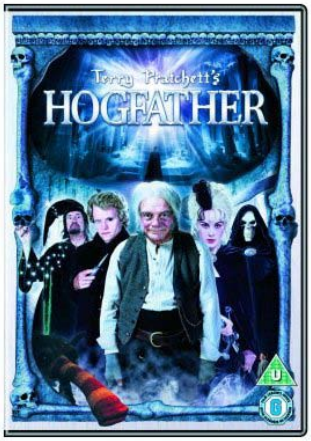
In 2003 a new series began following the career of young Tiffany Aching who is destined to be a witch. Although Discworld characters make brief appearances, Tiffany is mostly associated with the Nac Mac Feegles, a group of tiny antisocial Pictsie brigands. This allowed Pratchett to branch out into a whole new line of folklore and the supernatural. There are three books so far, *The Wee Free Men* (2003), *A Hatful of Sky* (2004) and *Wintersmith* (2006).

The Christmas 2008 offering was a complete change. *Nation* is a story of the myths and cultures of the South Seas. The local people are treated respectfully, but British colonial attitudes are lampooned in a way that only Terry Pratchett could do. Many were disappointed that it was not another Discworld novel but it was a great story in itself and the sly humour is still there.

There is one other point I must mention. Most of the early Discworld books had cover art by Josh Kirby. These are masterpieces in themselves and detail from some of them is shown in this article's header. Their frenzied detail and cartoonish style suited Pratchett's writing perfectly and I was a little disappointed when later covers by xht design and Paul Kidby didn't have the same enthusiastic style.

In nearly forty years of writing Terry Pratchett has claimed his place in British humour. He is a craftsman in his chosen field and his knighthood was well earned. Let's hope another generation, finally past Harry wots-his-name, will discover the Discworld. Perhaps there is another Terry Pratchett out there in the younger generation who will be inspired to carry on this wonderful genre.

Hogfather (2007)
R2 DVD
Fox



This interesting Terry Pratchett dark comedy explores the role of belief. The Auditors, a faceless group whose job is to make the Universe run properly, are concerned that the Hogfather is not quite suitable for the way they see the Universe. The Hogfather is the Discworld's equivalent of the happy Santa figure that we know, but it was not always so. He was once the dreaded figure of legend who had to be placated in mid-winter so the sun would come back.

Although traditionally a forest boar was hunted and killed to provide the blood sacrifice, human sacrifice was often a part of the ritual too. As the Discworld became more civilised and the superstition became old hat the Hogfather went through "industrial retraining" to become the current jolly gift-distributing legend. Belief in him among the Discworld inhabitants is very strong and this in turn makes the Hogfather a very difficult person to "assassinate". How do you kill someone who exists simply because people believe in him?

In the Assassins Guild in Ankh-Morepork there is a person who can do it - the insane but very efficient Mr. Teatime. He has actually studied the problem, purely as an academic exercise, and knows that the Hogfather's very existence is based on belief. He must take over the minds of the children, the strongest believers in the Hogfather. This can be done by kidnapping the Tooth Fairy and once he has the childrens' teeth he can control their minds by the old

magic. Mr Teatime can then reduce the belief in the Hogfather until the mythical person simply fades away. He puts his plan into action on behalf of the Auditors and strange things begin to happen.

There are two problems. As belief in the Hogfather drops, there is so much surplus "belief" floating around the Discworld that even minor beliefs like the Sock Monster that eats your socks in the laundry can now exist. How about Bibulous, the Oh God !!! of Hangovers? Odd creatures are popping up everywhere, sustained by sheer belief that is now strong enough to bring them into reality.

The other problem is Death, whose existence is also sustained by belief. Death and the Auditors do not get on well, and Death decides that he will take the Hogfather's place temporarily to keep the belief in the Hogfather alive. His attempts at meeting the demands of "little humans" are hilarious to say the least, but very effective. He has problems with childrens' wishes for toys – he tends to take their requests literally. If a little girl asks for a sword for Hogswatch, that's what Death gives her. She probably didn't really mean a six-foot razor-sharp killing implement. Death also has problems with the Hogfather's pigs (they pull the sleigh) and their poor toilet training.

While Death is otherwise engaged it falls to his niece, Susan Sto-Helit, to temporarily take over his usual role. The concept of a female Death surprises many people. She is not exactly assisted by Quoth, the raven, the Wizards of Unseen University, and Bibulous.

In the final showdown with the Auditors the old magic must come through and blood must be spilled so the sun will rise again. It is up to Susan to make sure of this.

Can this odd lot keep belief in the Hogfather going long enough to put an end to Mr. Teatime's evil plans? Can they regain control from the Auditors, who will do whatever it takes to see their plan through, including intervening in the ancient sacrificial ritual?

Readers are divided about the book. Although it is quite funny in Pratchett's classic way it is probably his darkest novel, dealing as it does with some of the least attractive parts of superstition and human nature. As a film it comes across even darker without as many of the subtle little humorous bits that Pratchett likes to add to his books.

Nevertheless it is a fine example of his storytelling Personally I have come to think of it as one of Terry Pratchett's finest works and the film is a good translation of the book. The actors are well cast with notable actors like Tony Robinson, David Jason, Joss Ackland and Nigel Planer filling minor roles. Michelle Dockery is brilliant as Susan and Marc Warren is perfect as the raving mad, giggling Teatime. The voice of Death is critical to the story and Ian Richardson gets it absolutely right.

If you enjoy the season of Santa, snow, holly, reindeer and the sheer commercialism of Christmas, this should cure you of it.

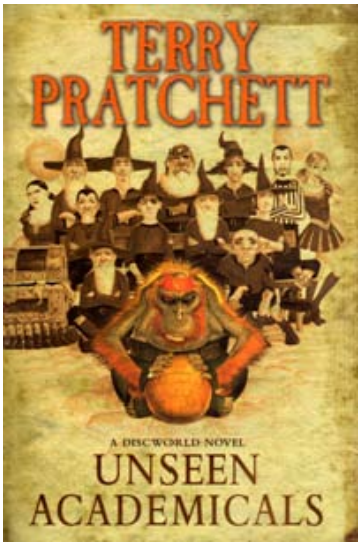
Unseen Academicals
Terry Pratchett
Fantasy, Comedy
Doubleday 20009

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

One of the little pleasures of Christmas each year is the new book from British writer Terry Pratchett. His Discworld series has been a favourite for many years. This year it is football's turn to receive the Pratchett treatment (and that's Soccer, real football, not rugby). He manages to tackle soccer hooligans, the rules of the game, heroes, and he even takes a passing swipe at ladies fashions.

The story is that Unseen University is largely funded by a bequest from a benefactor on condition that at least once every twenty years the University must participate in a football match. Ankh-Morepork football matches are more like bloody wars fought out between the teams and spectators from rival parts of town. The brawls have been getting more savage and people are starting to complain about the bloodshed. The Patrician, Lord Vetinari, is being pressured to Do Something About It. Although he disapproves of football generally and would rather ban the matches, this will cause civic insurrection in the city. He turns to the wizards of Unseen University to introduce a new form of football with teams, rules, and less bloodshed. There will definitely be no magic used – just athletic skill.

If you are a Pratchett fan you will know that "athletic" is not a word normally used in the same sentence as "wizard". The wizards however have the incentive to form a team. The bequest pays for 87 per cent of the wizards' massive food budget. "Food" and "Wizard" are two words that are naturally complementary. The University also has young Trev whose father was a football hero until he was killed during a match. Trev could be a brilliant footballer but has promised his Mum he would never take up the game. The University also has Mr Nutt, a rather shy and peculiar young man in the candle-dribbling department. He is a brilliant tactician, having spent some of his youth reading every book he could get his hands on. He spent the rest of his youth chained to an anvil.



"Employing professional (candle) dribblers might seem extravagant for a body like Unseen University. ……No traditional wizard worth his pointy hat could possibly work by the light of pure, smooth, dare one say virgin undribbled candles. It just would not look right."

Against them is a team comprising the best players from the various town teams, and the most vicious thugs and hooligans that Ankh-Morepork can produce. Since Vetinari is sponsoring the new football match, even his future may depend on it all working. Will Trev finally forgo his promise to his Mum? Will his new Dwarf MicroMail shorts protect him? Can Mr Nutt resist twisting heads off the opposition players when he finds out what he really is? Will the crowd accept the new football or will they go back to riots and bloodshed?

"The thing about football – the important thing about football – is that it is not just about football. "

If I have one negative comment about the book, it is the absence of the most regular character in the Discworld series. For the first time Death does not put in an appearance and I missed him. It's certainly not for lack of opportunities. The book is classic Pratchett, darkly funny, close examination of human behaviour, and just a little common sense and love interest.

The Cinema of Walerian Borowczyk

Eroticism, sex, is one of the most moral parts of life. Eroticism does not kill, exterminate, encourage evil, lead to crime. On the contrary, it makes people gentler, brings joy, gives fulfillment, leads to selfless pleasure.

Walerian Borowczyk

Walerian Borowczyk was born in Kwilcz, Poland on September 2rd, 1923. Little is known of his early life, his father was a painter and he was a teenager when Germany annexed Poland in 1939. Some critics have conjectured that the latter event had an influence on his obsession with both military and religious imagery and random violence as clearly illustrated throughout his animated and live action films.

He studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow devoting himself to painting, printmaking and graphic arts. He focused on the creation of cinema posters and won a national prize in 1953.

He moved to France in the Fifties and reoriented his career towards animation, working regularly on television projects. His earliest films include *Byl sobie raz* (*Time Upon a Once*) (1957) and *Dom* (*House*) (1958, with Jan Lenica). In 1959, he worked together with Chris Marker to produce *Les Astronautes* which is now celebrated as a masterful but surreal satire of space exploration. He returned to work with Lenica for two later animated films, *Le Concert de Monsieur et Madame Kabal* (1962) and *L'Encyclopedie de grand'mamman* (1963), which was the first in an uncompleted series using prints and illustrations as the basis for an animated tale.

In 1961 he produced Renaissance, an unusual stop motion animation which uses reverse motion to depict various destroyed objects (a prayer book, a stuffed owl, a trumpet and so on) re-assembling themselves, only to be destroyed again when the last object, a bomb is complete. This was followed by *Jeux des anges* (1964), which was not nearly as so playful.

Jeux des anges presents a vision of hell on earth, mixing religious and military imagery. It features a macabre journey to a prison camp where angels transform into executioners, shoot dead the prisoners and then slice up the corpses – all the time accompanied by ecclesiastical music. This also pre-empts Borowczyk's later more explicit anti-Catholicism.

Terry Gilliam nominated *Jeux des anges* as one of the ten most significant animated films of all times. All of these productions were shorts and it was not until 1967 that he directed his first feature length animation, *Théâtre de Monsieur & Madame Kabal: un film dessiné pour les adultes* (Mr. and Mrs. Kabal's Theatre).

Mr. and Mrs. Kabal's Theatre is quite an astounding early work of surreal animation. We meet a constantly bickering and arguing married couple, the Mr and Mrs. Kabal of the time.

Jeux des anges

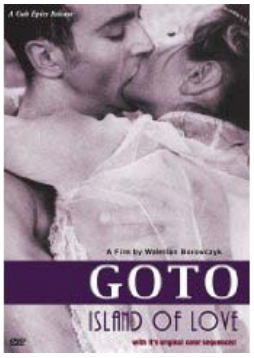
Borowczyk plays with their presentation, constantly replacing the head of Madame Kabal with such objects such as a bomb and the head of La Gioconda. Then the director totally alters our perception by entering the film himself and nearly gets seduced by Mrs. Kabal in her husband's absence. This strange occurrence totally destroys the usual barrier which exists between the filmmaker, the film and the audience and creates a truly surreal and bizarre experience. In many ways it reminds me of later Gilliam sketches for Monty Python.

Goto, Isle of Love

In 1968 Borowczyk decided to move into live action cinema and began to produce truly innovative but challenging titles. His first live action feature was *Goto, Isle of Love* (1968), which was followed by *Blanche* (1971). These are both tales of forbidden love and starred his wife, Ligia Branice.

Since an earthquake in thre19th century cut the Island of Goto off from the rest of the world, it has evolved its own distinctive traditions, eccentric laws and cultural forms, ruthlessly enforced by its sadistic leader Goto III. His subjects are subjugated to his will by violence, have shaven heads, work in stone quarries throughout the day and relax in state controlled brothels during the night.

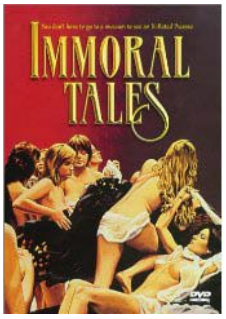
When the criminal Grozo is rehabilitated as the Court's fly catcher, he becomes obsessed with Goto's alluring wife Glossia. But Glossia is not interested as she is having an affair with her riding instructor. When Goto discovers her infidelity, he orders Grozo to kill her – thus granting him the power he has always wanted. Now in a position of strength, he will not be so easily controlled.



Goto is a surreal and fetishistic film, everyone is named with a G and the sheer bleakness of the film is overpowering. The classic score is used to emphasize the sheer insanity of the regime and *Goto* ends up being a highly amusing dark comedy. A superb edition has been released by Cult Epics (All region NTSC).

Blanche (1971) is very different from *Goto*. It is the tale of a senile baron with a beautiful young wife (Branice) who everyone wants to bed. She is rather simple and doesn't really appreciate the precariousness of her position. Her favorite pet is a white dove kept in a cage, which is used to mirror her condition. Along the way we met her rather empty-headed lover, a randy page and a wide range of ribald images of desire thwarted. These are further exaggerated by the strange castle which is filled with mechanical devices and eccentric décor. In Blanche the sets are as much characters within the film as the actors, it is quite startling how Borowczyk takes the look of a 13th century medieval tapestry and turns it into a work of cinema.

In 1975 he produced *A Story of Sin* which was nominated for a Palme d'or, it was a highly successful adaptation of a Polish literary classic by Stefan Żeromski which focused on young woman in pursuit of a romance with an older man. While welcomed by the critics, it was tame in comparison with what followed.



Borowczyk always celebrated the erotic and was never shy of controversy and his films from this time onwards became increasing bizarre and explicit. Beginning with *Immoral Tales* (1974), he moved onto produce the truly enigmatic *La Bête* (*The Beast*) (1975) which was a dark fairy tale for adults with an extremely amorous beast. Immortal Tales has a DVD release from Anchor Bay but it has been discontinued and is only available on the second hand market.

While his early films were well received and the excesses of his animations seen as mere eccentricity, his exploration of sexuality in its di-

verse presentations shocked many viewers, though they still flocked to watch them. Immoral tales was comprised of four short films which explore sexuality and deviation using various historical periods as a backdrop. They are beautifully presented but have what could be considered fairly shocking content presented in a frank and matter of fact manner.

Subjects like fellatio, masturbation, incest, pain and pleasure (BDSM) and sex are death are given historical settings and portrayed in amazing tableaux's comprising perfectly created set pieces using a wide range of items which all take on special significance, ranging from a wooden doll to a cucumber, erotic art to religious figures. His portrayal of the human condition is strongly Freudian, suppressed sexuality governed by religion and ritual, explodes as a force which cannot be controlled and manifests in a myriad of forms, some more benign than others.

This was followed in 1975 by *La Bête* (*The Beast*), which was seen by Borowczyk as the fifth segment of the *Immoral Tales* and is certainly his most controversial film. It is an amazingly bizarre fairy tale, but in the original sense of the term. Today we see fairy tales as nice little stories to entertain children; harmless fantasies of elves, fairies and distant lands. However, they were not always so benign. For example, in 1845 *Struwwelpeter* was a hugely popular German children's book by Heinrich Hoffmann. It comprised ten illustrated and rhymed stories. Each had a clear message that demonstrated the disastrous consequences of bad behavior in a highly extreme and in many cases violent way. It was used by parents to threaten their children with the end that befalls those who do not do what they are told. These are not nice tales, thumbs are sheared off, eyes fall out of sockets, faces are pecked to death and bodies waste to nothing! Other tales of the Medieval period explored sexuality and violent

in a variety of mythic forms, in many ways The Beast mixes together these genres and creates a sexually charged adult fairy tale, which was based on the story Lokis by Prosper Mérimée.

In this quite beautiful yet shocking tale, the Marquis de l'Esperance wishes to safeguard his estate and family lineage so arranges a marriage between his son, Mathurin, and an English heiress, Lucy Broadhurst. At the same time the Marquis is putting pressure, unsuccessfully, on the Duc De Balo, to get his brother the cardinal to attend the wedding mass. As Lucy arrives with her aunt, a priest is seeing to Mathurin's baptism. The family is not what it seems, the priest has an unhealthy interest in young boys, the family and indeed Lucy all have strange obsessions including one about horses having sex. The whole film explores the dysfunction of a sexually suppressed, out-of-touch family unit plagued with all manner of hidden secrets, blackmail, strange liaisons and deviation.

As the story continues and as they wait for the cardinal, Lucy uncovers one of the family's most hidden secrets. It is the story of a young woman who was raped by a wild beast in the grounds of the château some 200 years before. This leads into to the film's most startling sequence, an extended flashback which offers a very explicit retelling of the Beauty and the Beast myth. In this version, the beast, a man in a rather obvious bear costume chases a beautiful young maiden, naked except for a corset, through the forest before confronting her with a phallus of monstrous proportions and having his way with her in various positions. This sequence is extremely explicit and will certainly confront those not ready for it.

On many levels it is humorous and amusing; on the other hand you certainly have to have a certain quirky sense of humor to enjoy it. This is a pretty over the top cinematic experience, not one matched in any other film, comedic or serious. The fact that the bear is obviously a man in a suite has obvious psychological meaning

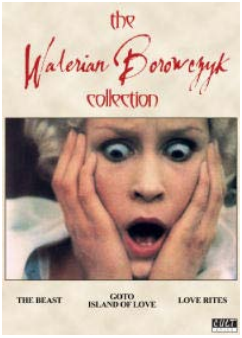
(man is just another animal) and the inherent violence underneath the humour is unsettling to say the least.

At the same time this is a beautifully produced surreal story which has much in common I am sure with true Medieval stories and tales which would have abounded in the countryside; it explores themes of family dysfunction, sexual desire, love and death in a way which is quite unique.

This edition from Umbrella Entertainment is in a word, delectable!! It is a director's cut, beautifully clear with a clarity of sound which is astounding, considering this is an older cult film; it is amazing to see such a superb edition available. The colours are breathtaking and it really shows off the cinematographic skills for which Borowczyk was so well regarded. In many ways this makes the film even more bizarre, it is so perverse yet so beautifully and skillfully produced. It is different from anything that most viewers will ever see anywhere else.

It comes in a two DVD set, the second disc includes a truly comprehensive documentary The Making of *la Bete* (105 minutes) and an interviews, biography and gallery. There is also a limited edition 3 DVD set from Cult Epics (All Region US Release).

There is also a collected works set from Cult Epics which includes *Goto*, *La Bête* and *Love Rites*.



The Beast was followed by *La Marge* (aka *The Streetwalker*) (1976), *Interno Di Un Convento* (*Behind Convent Walls*) (1978), a classic of Nunsploitation and *Les heroines du mal* (aka *Heroines of Evil* or *Three Immoral Women*) (1978).

In the Eighties he made *Lulu* (1980), *Docteur Jekyll Et Les Femmes* (*The Blood Of Dr Jekyll*) (1981), *Ars Amandi* (*The Art Of Love*) (1983), *Emmanuelle V* (1987) and *Cérémonie D'Amour* (Love Rites) (1987).

There is much debate about the quality of his later works which seemed to vary between inspired and, at times, very average softcore erotica. They were uneven and never really matched the success of his early films.

Love Rites (1987) his last film, for example is a strange and enigmatic film which offers little context for what it presents. It tells the tale of a young man looking for a good time. He picks up a seemingly average and normal woman, they go to her home, and make love.

After intercourse, she suddenly displays monstrous, razor-tipped claws and emasculates him. While clearly there is a mythological subtext and even a passing reference to the "black widow" spider this does not really come out in the film. While it has flashes of his earlier "dark fairy tales" it has lost most of the sparkle which marked his earlier workers. Certainly by this time the critics and public alike were not taking much notice of his films and sadly this remains one of his less successful efforts. *Love Rites* is available in an all region NTSC release from Cult Epics.

At the same time even among these later films, a couple do stand out. *Behind Convent Walls* (1978) and *Docteur Jekyll Et Les Femmes* (The *Blood Of Dr Jekyll* or *Dr Jekyll and his Women*) (1981).

Behind Convent Walls aka *Sex Life in a Convent* and *Within a Cloister* (*Interno di un convent*) is loosely based on Roman Walks, a story written by the notorious 19th century French author Stendhal.

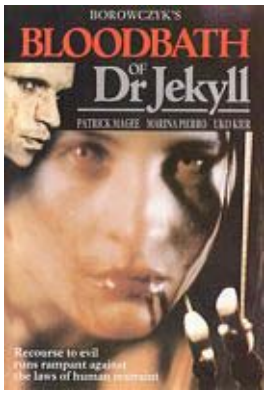
It was photographed by Cinematographer Luciano Tovoli who would also work on Dario

Argento's *Suspiria* and hence there is a superior use of light, colour and texture.

This film is one of the classic examples of nunsploitation exploring the dangers of sexual suppression and the freedom offered through licentiousness and desire. To achieve this end Borowczyk mixes together a very humanistic view of the difficulties suffered by nuns locked within a psychologically damaging system with a scathing attack on the Catholic Church. At the same time he loads the film with lots of action ranging – masturbation, nymphomania, fun with the local lads, lesbian love and homemade dildo's; all supervised by a mother superior who is nothing less than a sex fiend. One of the most infamous scenes involves a nun with a home-made wooden dildo which is a superbly ecstatic scene. It dwells between eroticism and adult film, never quite crossing the line into porn, emphasizing the power of the erotic over the modern trend to simply show explicit sex.

There are all sorts of scandals from sexual to poisoning and the mandatory cover-up by the Church authorities, it is a startling film, erotically charged superbly exploitative. It is a hard film to find and we were able to locate a great copy from Cinema De Bizarre (http://www.cinema-de-bizarre.com). It is clear, offers excellent sound and at the same time it is well worth checking out their range of other rare and obscure titles.

Borowczyk's adaptation of Dr.Jekyll and Mr.Hyde *Docteur Jekyll Et Les Femmes* (1981) was focused on Jekyll's inner rebellion against



bourgeois morality and was released under various names including *The Bloodbath of Dr.Jekyll* and *Dr.Jekyll and His Women*, it starred Udo Kier and Patrick Magee. The film takes place before, during and immediately after the engagement party of Dr.Henry Jekyll (Udo Kier) and Miss Fanny Osborne, attended by numerous highly respectable guests (a lecherous general, a doctor, a priest, a lawyer), the last of which informs the company that a child has been murdered in the street outside. While the others watch a young dancer perform, Dr.Jekyll instructs the lawyer to alter his will, leaving everything to a certain Mr.Hyde. Shortly afterwards, the dancer is found murdered, and the guests realise that one of their number must not only be a maniac but a man with a monstrous sexual appetite. The film is populated by suppressed and distorted "Victorian" personalities and the only healthy individuals seem to the Doctor and his young wife to be. It is available from Cinema De Bizarre as *Bloodbath of Dr.Jekyll* and is completely uncut.

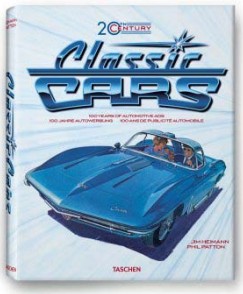
He was also the author of two books; *Anatomia diabła* (*Anatomy of Devil*) (1992) and *Moje polskie lata* (*My Polish Years)* (2002).

He died at the age of 82 of heart failure in Paris on Feb 3rd, 2006, how he is to be remembered is an interesting question. Critics are fickle and so while his animations are admired and some of his films celebrated his open exploration of sexuality have led many to brandish that memry staining word "pornographer". The fact of the matter is that one man's porn is another man's eroticism and Borowczyk explored the fringes of the cinematic world at a time when many others were more inclined to play it safe. Sadly he paid for his creativity and with limited funds his later films never uneven and at times clearly constrained by budget. That being said there are some true gems in the Borowczyk canon, who can forget the enflamed monster of *The Beast*, the strange stories of *Immoral Tales* or the naughty nuns of *Behind Convent Walls* ?

While certainly a filmmaker who worked at the "edge" he is worth exploring for those seeking more adventurous cinema.

BOOKS & PRINT

20th Century Classic Cars
Jim Heimann and Phil Patton
Taschen 2009



Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Subtitled "100 Years of Automotive Ads", this book is a strongly American celebration of the automobile, seen through the advertising of the cars and accessories. It is a parade of social life, fashions and automotive styles that looks quaint to us now. We must remember that in the early days a car was very expensive and was a prestige symbol. It was only natural, therefore, that Lozier's ad would mention "*The Quality Car for Quality People*". The book also shows some of the characteristics of early cars. The most notable feature is the chauffeur. He was not so much a status symbol as a necessity. He was the mechanic, driver, washer and polisher and general caretaker of the car just as a stableman would have looked after the horses only a few years earlier. The ads also show the chauffeur in a semi-exposed driver's seat. The passengers rode in heated and electrically lit comfort in the rear "saloon".

Much was made of new developments like pneumatic tyres and electric lighting and accessories like the Chase Plush Motor Car Robes. Electric cars like the Milburn and Brush made their appearance. Custom coachbuilding was still a common option. Women were appearing in the ads – were they now choosing the cars or were they just a fashion accessory?

During the 1920s the advertising moved to the family as cars became cheaper. The changing fashions in clothing also changed the appearance of cars. The high roof to allow for mens' top hats was gone and a lower roofline was more common. Convertibles were portrayed as a more fun image, especially as younger people began to buy cars. In 1927 a new campaign for Stutz advertised "*The Improved New Safety Stutz*" finally recognising just how dangerous some of these cars were.

"*Somewhere West Of Laramie there's a bronco-busting , steer-roping girl who knows what I'm talking about. She can tell what a sassy pony, that's a cross between greased lightning and the place where it hits, can do with eleven hundred pounds of steel and action when he's going high, wide and handsome. The truth is – the Jordan Playboy was built for her".* No, I have no idea what they are talking about either.

"*Most automobiles are like most men. They are either all right or all wrong, but seldom one or the other for long at a time. That's probably why they call it a Woman's car, its so consistent". –* **Willys-Overland advertisement, 1921**.

In the 1930s the boxy house-on-wheels look was gradually overtaken by a new styling feature, streamlining. Following the Depression car advertising concentrated more on price rather than luxury. The motor car was now utilitarian and the front seat for the chauffeur (and the chauffeur himself) disappeared. Marketing emphasised miles per gallon. By 1935 the Chrysler Airflow had long, flowing front mudguards, spats covering the rear wheels, a low roofline, white sidewall tyres, an automatic overdrive and a distinctly family look. The running boards still made a reduced appearance but there was no longer room for a chorus line on them. The ad mentioned a fuel saving of up to five miles per gallon, but there was no mention of engine size or number of cylinders.

"*The Lincoln Zephyr has a extra roominess*". It had a ten-foot wheelbase but only seated three. Most of the roominess was taken up by a V-12 motor. The American love of V-8 motors was not yet universal. In my younger days an acquaintance owned a Nash "gangster car" that featured a monumental straight eight cylinder engine. The gentle rumble of this automotive giant at idle could allegedly melt the panties off

(Cover. Courtesy of General Motors Corporation. Copyright 1978)

young maidens at twenty paces. We felt like royalty as we cruised around town behind that seven-foot bonnet, with the car's top down.

The 1940s brought severe changes to the industry with production turning to war materiel. Cars became shorter and less exuberant, engines became smaller to cope with rationing of petrol. After the decades of flamboyance it was notable that the early 1940s saw the ultimate austerity vehicle, the Willys Jeep. With designers turning to aircraft production it was not surprising that postwar cars adopted some of the styling features more typical of aircraft. Perhaps the ultimate stupidity was in the 1948 Cadillac which featured the first tail fins, based on the fuselage shape of the P38 fighter. The 1948 Tucker "Torpedo" had an extra central headlight mounted in a bulge in the bonnet, also reminiscent of the twin-boom-and-central-cockpit P38. Not surprisingly only fifty were made but the book has a photo of a group of golfers standing around a Tucker and photographing it. Strangely the 1951 Studebaker had a similar looking front.

The book also has an ad for the six-cylinder Chevrolet on which Australia's first home-grown car, the 48-215 Holden was based. The Chevy was proudly announced as "*America's biggest money's worth*" and it proved to be the same in Australia.

The cars of the 1950s reflected an industry coming out of wartime austerity and loving it – long and low, V8-powered, tail fins of some-

Pontiac LeMans, 1971, Courtesy Taschen

times ridiculous proportions, and half a ton of chrome scattered around the bodywork. The front of the car was a confection of chrome, glass and steel that posed a severe danger to slow pedestrians. Air conditioning was becoming more common. All this had a price – fuel consumption was abysmal.

Towards the end of the decade some enterprising dealers began to bring in more practical cars for the crowded cities. In 1959 the Austin Mini appeared. Although the Mini did not exactly stun Americans with its nimble handling or incredible fuel economy, another foreign company did finally crack the market – Volkswagen. The Kombi van's side door and frugal fuel consumption appealed to a lot of Americans and prepared them to accept foreign cars. The Volkswagen "Beetle" became a cult car. Luxury cars like the Mercedes made inroads into the market. Jaguar's E-Type was made by DeSoto. In 1969 Honda made a headon assault on the US market with its small but economic and well-built Honda 600.

Ford Galaxie, 1960 (Courtesy Taschen)

The US manufacturers continued to produce their land whales, seemingly oblivious to the tidal wave of imports that was about to engulf them. They simply knew that American motorists preferred big powerful family cars and kept building them, although smaller models were gradually slipping into their range. Every now and then they got it right, as did Ford with its classic Mustang series. The imports generally were in the small-car area and names like Fiat, Toyota, Datsun and Renault appeared. Often these were bought as a second car for Mum or a cheap car

for the kids. The quality and handling of these cars was a lesson to Americans, whose big cars were tending to suffer quality problems in the drive to reduce costs. Then the crunch came – world oil shortages.

Then the crunch came – world oil shortages.

Suddenly these funny little foreign cars were being eagerly bought. The buyers found they had a car with all the extras included, reliable and tightly built, often sporty and fun to drive, and above all economic. Even after the first fuel crises eased off many Americans stayed with their thrifty little foreigners.

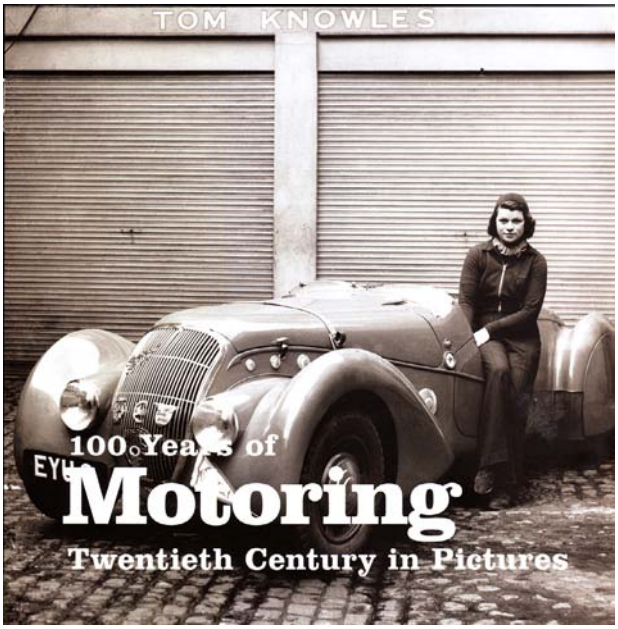
The massive book covers nearly all of the cars in a beautiful hardbound high-quality format. It is so much more than a catalogue of car ads. It is presented in English, French and German in the same volume.

Although it is strongly US-oriented the overseas influence is not ignored. I had a lot of fun and nostalgia trips reading or just looking through this wonderful book.

100 Years of Motoring
Twentieth Century in Pictures
2009
Press Association Images
Published by Ammonite Press
Capricorn Link (Australia)

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

The motor car changed our lifestyles and our cities. The changes were not always for the better. The car caused as many problems as it cured. Although we now had faster transport, in return we got speed limits. Although personal transport was now in our reach, it was in everyone else's reach as well and we got traffic jams. Every time the motor car changed history a photographer was there to record it. This book's three hundred photos are selected from the archives of the British Press Association and they are a tribute to the cars and those who drove, designed or photographed them. The photos are of high quality, especially considering their age. Without a book like this the photos would still lie ignored and unknown in an archive somewhere. Thanks to the archivists of the Press Association these wonderful photos can again be enjoyed.



What a rich collection it is ! From the first photo of an electric tram alongside a new "trackless tram" (basically an omnibus powered from the tram power lines, but not running on tracks) we can see that the book will explore many of the byways of the motor car. A 1904 photo shows the electric trams running along the Victoria Embankment in London. There is not a horse in sight but there are many of the earliest motor cars, including a glorious little three-wheeler that would be an attention-getter today. Famous figures were always a good excuse for a photo, and we have a younger, slimmer Winston Churchill alighting from one of the new petrol powered "Taximeters" in 1908. The taxi is interesting. The passenger sits in the "saloon" at the back (built with a very high roof to cater for a gentleman's top hat) while the menial cabbie sits in an open and roofless front compartment. Ah, the class system at its finest.

A 1915 photo shows a motor car alongside a horse-drawn cab (they survived in London until 1947). A weakness of the horse is shown in the picture – a pile of horse dung under the cab. Londoners eventually traded horse dung for air pollution. That's progress.

If two cars are driving in the same direction one driver is going to try to go faster than the other. It's just one of those laws of human behaviour. By 1905 the Automobile Association was formed to help stranded motorists and to advise on a new evil, the speed trap. Car racing soon caught the public's imagination and as usual there were photographers there to record it. After World War I there were plenty of surplus aero engines lying around, so what was more natural than to build one into a motor car and see how fast it would go?

The 300 mph mark was reached in 1935 by Sir Malcolm Campbell. The cars were huge and achieved heroic speeds. The brakes were tiny and did nothing much to slow the cars down. Motor accidents became more common. I wouldn't be at all surprised if someone somewhere started to mutter "speed kills". We also have a photo of a 1929 motor ambulance and another of that new motoring evil, the policeman on a motorbike.

After the restrictions of World War II were lifted the industry took off again. So, apparently, did the motorists. A 1956 picture shows a sign urging motorists to "Take Your Foot Off !" - not an attempt at self-mutilation, but trying to persuade motorists to slow down through the city of Lancaster.

The post-War period spawned a number of interesting cars and once again the photographers were there.

Three-wheeler cars and microcars had their day. It is interesting that some of these concepts are returning as our cities become more congested. Following the Suez crisis and resulting oil shortages fuel economy suddenly became important. Engines got smaller but clever design got the maximum horsepower out of them. This was another sign of changing times ahead and was typified by the Mini in 1953.

In spite of the fuel costs people liked their mobility. Scattered throughout the book are photos of caravans ranging from little compact fibreglass ones that could be towed behind pushbikes to monsters that looked more like railway carriages.

The huge Earl's Court Motor Show catered for the motor car passion by featuring just about everything with an engine. For some reason the photographers seemed to prefer the cars with nubile bikini-clad young ladies draped over them. There may be a negative side to this, but I haven't been able to think of one.

The photos now take a sombre tone. Speed limits, radar guns, the Breathalyser, parking meters and petrol shortages were all sent to try the patience of the British motorist. There is a lovely but disturbing photo of a farmer with his horse drawn buggy parked in front of a petrol bowser at his local service station.

The attendant appears to be wondering where he should stick the hose.

That iconic British motor vehicle, the London double-decker bus, gets its share of photos. In one of the first colour shots in the book we see thirteen of them in their natural environment – being jumped over by Evel Knievel on a motorbike.

As for the future, who knows? The motor car as we know it must disappear, but what will replace it? What will we use for fuel? And how can I make mine go faster than yours? Perhaps these and other important questions will be answered in another hundred years when the next edition of this worthy book is published.

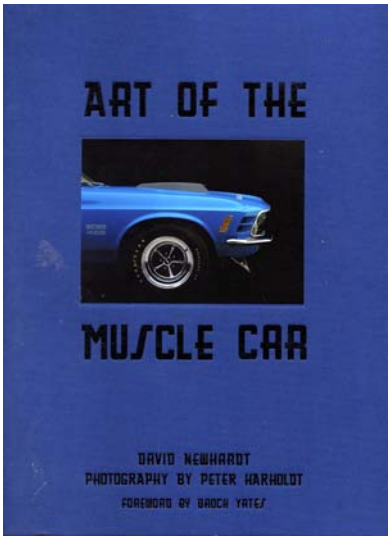
Art of the Muscle Car
David Newhardt
Photography by Peter Harholdt
MotorBooks (2009)
Capricorn Link (Australia)

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

This beautiful book is an unashamed tribute to the American muscle car of the 1960s and early seventies. It must be admitted that they were fuel guzzlers with dreadful handling and often quite ugly looks, but many people lusted after them and bought them in huge numbers.

They finally went the way of all dinosaurs, not killed off by a comet but gradually made extinct by rising fuel prices, ridiculous insurance premiums and cries that they were dangerous.

Now we can only look back at them with nostalgia and forgive them their faults. In the great grey blandness that is our current auto industry these cars stand out as individuals, a sign of what there was before conformity was forced on us. Peter Harholdt's beautiful photography highlights the surviving preserved cars and gives us some idea of what we have lost.



Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and all that, but even the most biased observer would have to admit that some of these cars were almost indescribably ugly. Rear boot lids the size of a small airport featured for many years. The front grille treatment varied from the breadslicer look of the 1971 Dodge Charger Super Bee to the unbelievable rocket-shaped profile of the nose of the 1970 Plymouth Road Runner Super Bird. From the front the whole bonnet had the flat sloping look of later Italian models, but there was just so much of it!

The huge nose was offset by a monumental and impractical rear spoiler that rose so high it would be a danger to low flying aircraft. The whole car was longer than a politician's campaign speech, and it only had two doors in all that sheet metal. But practicality wasn't what these cars were about. It was purely about street pose value and these cars had it by the bagful. Harholdt's photo of the Plymouth captures this and he even manages to make the Plymouth look quite sexy.

Not all the car styling was a disaster. There is

Ford's sex-on-wheels Mustang range and Pontiac's final parting shot, the plain but deadly looking 1973 TransAm. Even in bland white it looked like it was coming to get you.

Those days are gone now. A two door car is a rarity, as is a V8 of 400+ cubic inches. I wouldn't say that car styling has improved but it now has none of the individuality of these muscle cars. Still, at least we have this book to remind us of what was.

As befits such a labour of love by the author and photographer, the book is hard bound and beautifully presented on quality gloss paper that makes the most of the photos.

Commando:
Anzac Heroes
George Low
Allen & Unwin 2009

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Ah yes, the Commando Comics – mainstay of kids' reading in the 1960s. Simplistic plots, great drawing, stereotype characters, and even sometimes a bit of historical accuracy. I didn't know they sometimes published stories with an Australian or New Zealand orientation so I looked forward to reading these. I wasn't disappointed.

ANZAC was technically the abbreviation for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps that fought at Gallipoli in the First World War and in Greece and Crete in World War 2. It has become something of a general term for any group of Aussies and Kiwis fighting alongside each other.

As well as ANZAC stories from the two areas mentioned above, we have a rather nice story of racial tolerance set in the early days of New Zealand's white settlement and the battles with the Maoris. The Australian aboriginals appear in the WW2 stories as well. Their role in the war in the far north of Australia is largely untold and greatly underappreciated but they receive a fair treatment at the hands of the story writers.

There are unusual stories. One is about an Australian infiltrator in Borneo who has "gone native" and started collecting heads from the Japanese soldiers to prove his power to the headhunter tribe he leads. In another story we meet Willy "Wing Heels" Taonea, a Maori soldier whose sprinting ability gets him and his fellow soldiers out of trouble.

Another story mentions an event in New Guinea on the Kokoda Trail that is still controversial. A group of undertrained and underequipped Australian militia broke and retreated before the advancing Japanese. The Australian Commander-in-Chief who had no experience at all of the conditions in New Guinea branded them cowards and it took a long time to live down that reputation.

Most of the characters are still stereotypes. Instead of Germans saying "Gott in Himmel" and "Schweinhund" we now have Japanese saying

"Ayeee" and "By Shinto". Every story seems to have a character called "Bluey" – a nickname for redheaded people.

The Australians are usually a bit rough and ready, always in trouble, but basically good mates.

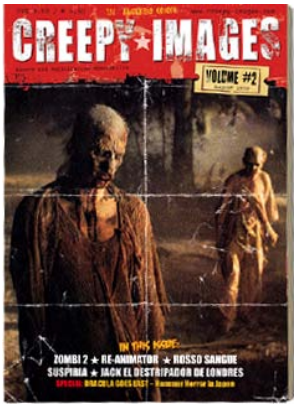
Because the stories are set in different battle areas to the British stories they have a different sort of feel to them. I found this quite a change from the more traditional Commando story. I really enjoyed this collection.

Creepy Images Volumes #1 and #2

Fans have always been devoted to movie memorabilia especially that connected to cult, horror and exploitation cinema; but it is never easy to find. So often what makes a film so unique in such genres in that it is a small run and low production film and only after many years does it true "cult potential" becoming discovered.

This means that memorabilia in the form of posters, lobby cards, promotional materials, pressbooks and related items are hard to find.

Creepy Images is quite an astounding magazine dedicated solely to exploitation memorabilia, it is beautifully produced with stunning colour and packed with rare content.



There is a "checklist" at the beginning which clearly explains the different types of memorabilia and a short introduction to each film.

In Volume #1 memorabilia is reproduced from Antropophagus (aka Man-Eater by Joe D'Amato), The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, Shock Waves, Le Notti Del Torrore (Zombie III aka Burial Ground) and Dracula Contra Frankenstein. So many of these are such rare films it is absolutely marvellous to see the memorabilia that went with them, Antropophagus is next to impossible to see in Australia at all (unless you import a copy), so it is even more amazing to see the stunning posters and cards that went with its release. This is 46 pages of cinematic bliss !!

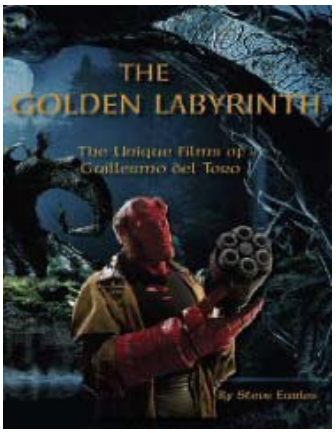
Volume #2 is ever bigger (50 pages) and has been expanded to include research on various aspects of memorabilia. In this issue Armin Junge offers some fascinating insights about Japanese cinema posters and lobby cards from Hammer Studios. Films covered are Zombi 2 (aka Woodoo), Re-Animator, Dracula Goes East, Rosso Sangue (aka Horrible), Suspiria, Jack El Destripador De Londres (aka 7 Murders for Scotland Yard).

I especially like the expanded text content in Volume #2 which gives extensive information on the way in which the films were marketed. The article with Dracula Goes East is a fascinating journey into how the Hammer films were perceived in Japan.

This is really a unique magazine, packed with amazing content, insightful commentary and reproductions of rare memorabilia. Who could ask for more !

Web: http://www.creepy-images.com

The Golden Labyrinth: The Unique Films of Guillermo Del Toro
Steve Earles
Noir Publishing
2009



Noir Publishing is a small English publishing company which has been wowing the market with some truly top notch cinema titles.

The Dead Walk, offered a definitive look at Zombie films, while *Flowers from Hell* offered a superb examination of Japanese Horror. Their titles are marked by superb production values, glossy presentation, high quality illustrations and erudite content; The Golden Labyrinth it is no exception.

Taking the strange, wonderful and enigmatic cinema of Guillermo Del Toro Steve Earles offers us the very first comprehensive examination of Del Toro's work. Extensively illustrated it includes over 200 images including many rare photographs, ad mats & posters.

Earles opens with a solid profile of Del Toro and then moves into extensive coverage of each of his films. This includes an extremely generous synopsis, outlines of significant themes and finishing with a very insightful analysis of each film.

This is probably the most extensive coverage Del Toro's works have ever received and is

Cronos

matched with a deep understanding of his work; one cannot accuse Earles of not digging below the surface. Earles is keenly aware of the themes, motifs and ideas behind Del Toro's films as well as his astute use of symbolism and imagery. He also covers such significant issues as production costs, budgets and so on.

Along the way we also get to experience Del Toro direct by a generous helping of quotes as well as some unusual background to the subjects being covered. For example Earles discusses the esotericism of Alchemy in relation to the film Cronos and the influence of both The Spanish Civil War and the works of Goya on Pan's Labyrinth.

Earles also considered Del Toro's early career and the significance of his earlier films as well as the *Hellboy* animated series.

Del Toro is a unique director whose work spans the genres from horror to fantasy action to comic book graphic cinema. He is able to combine imbue this mix with subtle symbolism, powerful social commentary and significant themes.

This is a beautiful looking work, filled with images, packed with informed and erudite commentary and while offering lots of film summaries, is not simply a compendium of reviews. It is very easy for a retrospective on a director's work to end up as a series of loosely connected film reviews; instead Earles offers a textured and reflective work examining the vision of one of the most innovative of modern directors with insight and quite some erudition!

The team from *Hellboy II*

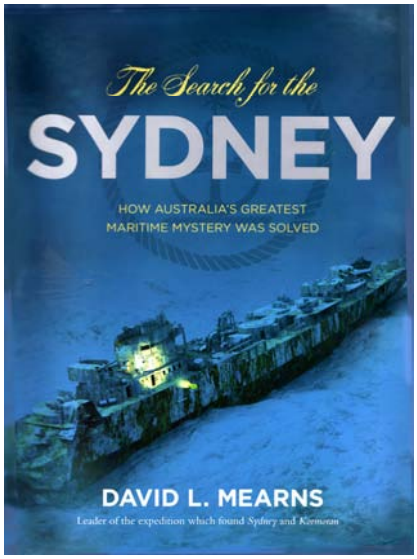
Noir Publishing
Web: http://www.noirpublishing.co.uk

The Search for the HMAS Sydney
David L Mearns
Harper Collins
2009

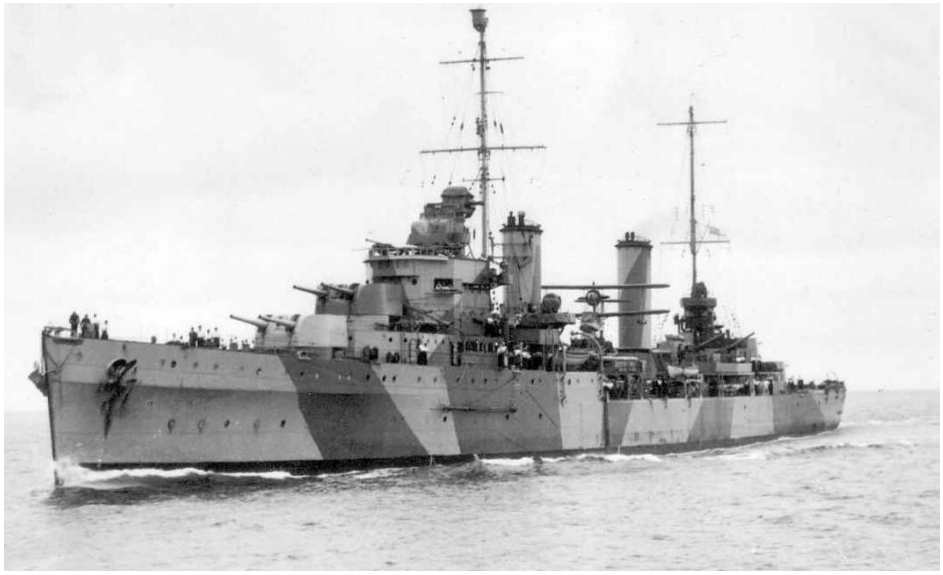
Reviewer: Bob Estreich

The loss of the HMAS Sydney during World War Two was the Royal Australian Navy's greatest tragedy and mystery. All that was known was that in 1941 it had come into combat with the German commerce raider Kormoran and both ships had been sunk. Survivors from the Kormoran told of a cruiser closing with their ship, of a savage close range gun battle, of their own ship on fire and about to explode, and Sydney heading off into the night fiercely ablaze. There were no survivors from the Sydney to tell its story. The Royal Australian Navy maintained an interest and groups of family of the crewmen kept pressing for a search, but the question was where to search? As the map shows, the possible locations based on best guesses cover much of the Western Australian coastline and well out to sea. The Navy could not spend money on a search until the location could be better pinned down.

Enter David Mearns. He had experience in wreck location and recovery, an obsession with drawing on original documents to eliminate errors in translation, and the ability to put all the information together and arrive at a useful answer. The book discusses in detail his search for original papers in the RAN and Royal Navy archives and his trips to Germany and South America to interview survivors. One of his biggest problems was that most of the evidence available came from the German crew members. Many people suspected that the Germans were hiding something sinister. Mearns decided to accept their reports at face value and mapped out a likely area where the wreck could be found. First he had to find the Kormoran. Its position when it blew up was fairly well known by the German survivors. If its wreck was located where the Germans said it was, their stories would be verified. He could then use the German reports of the time, speed and direction of the blazing Sydney to define a smaller area where its wreck should be.

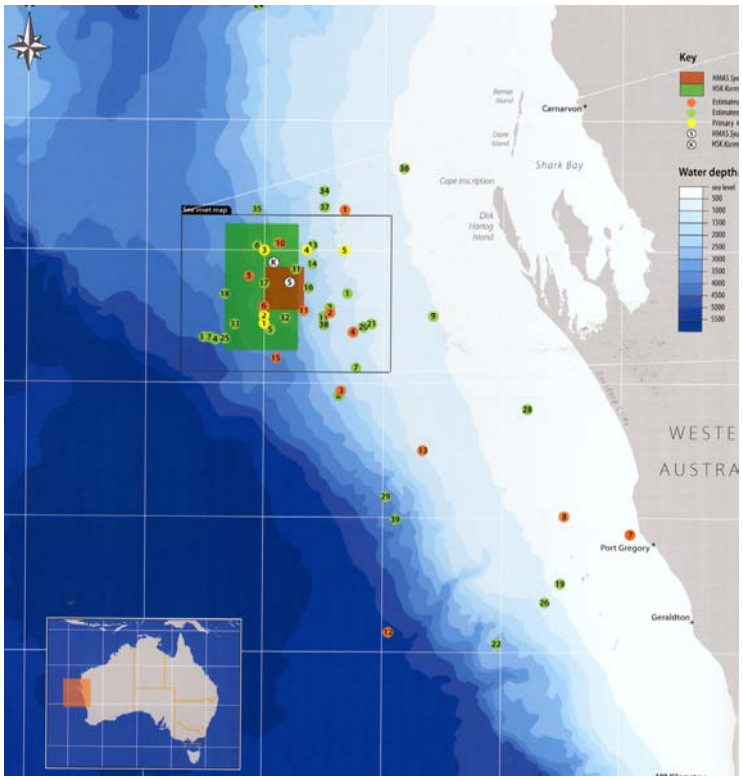


He also looked at the current, wind and drift patterns of the Kormoran's lifeboats. By backtracking from where they were picked up or landed on the coast it should be possible to tighten up the likely site. There was no "X marks the spot", just a large area of ocean to be examined with side scanning sonar. This would show any irregularities on the ocean floor. Mearns knew the size and shape of the ships and he had previous experience in what a debris field from a sunken warship would look like. The final test would be a photographic scan of the wrecks. It would all have to be done by remote control since it was well below the depth for divers or manned submersibles.



The next problem was funding. Despite the constant sniping from other researchers who insisted he was searching the wrong area, eventually the Australian Government funded the search. There followed a period of setting up – finding a ship, hiring the sonar gear, testing and repairing it, dodging a cyclone. Getting the ship to sea in working condition was almost as big a task as working out the position to search. All Mearns' intensive research

was justified when in March 2008 the wreckage of the Kormoran was found. The prearranged plan to search for the Sydney using the Kormoran's position as a basis was then set in motion. On March 8 the wreck of the Sydney was found. It was an emotional moment for many Australians.

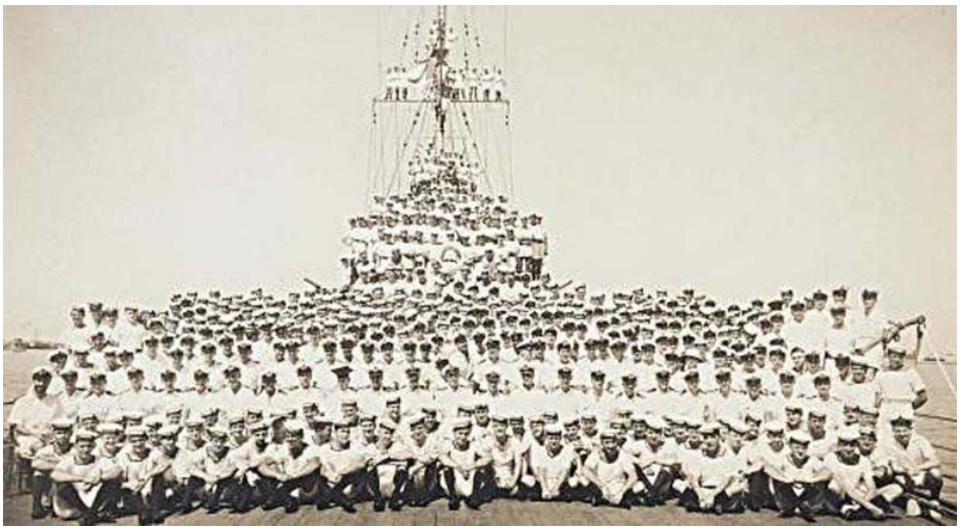


His photos of the wreck show the extent of the damage. Captain Burnett, apparently deceived by the Kormoran's pretence of being a Dutch merchant ship, had sailed the Sydney to well within range of the powerful guns on the Kormoran. When Kormoran opened fire the damage to Sydney was intense. The bridge was destroyed, gun turrets were put out of action, the torpedo tubes were rendered useless, and many crewmen died in a hail of bullets from the antiaircraft guns.

Most of the lifeboats and floats were destroyed and the firefighting equipment was put out of action. Finally a torpedo hit Sydney near the bows and she veered away from the Kormoran, on fire and sinking. Sydney got one of its gun turrets operating and inflicted terrible damage to the Kormoran. A raging fire was started next to the hold containing the Kormoran's sea mines and an explosion was imminent. There was time to evacuate the ship but when the mines blew up they broke the Kormoran in two. The pictures of the damage allowed a reconstruction of the battle. They were also a poignant reminder of what death in bloody battle really meant.

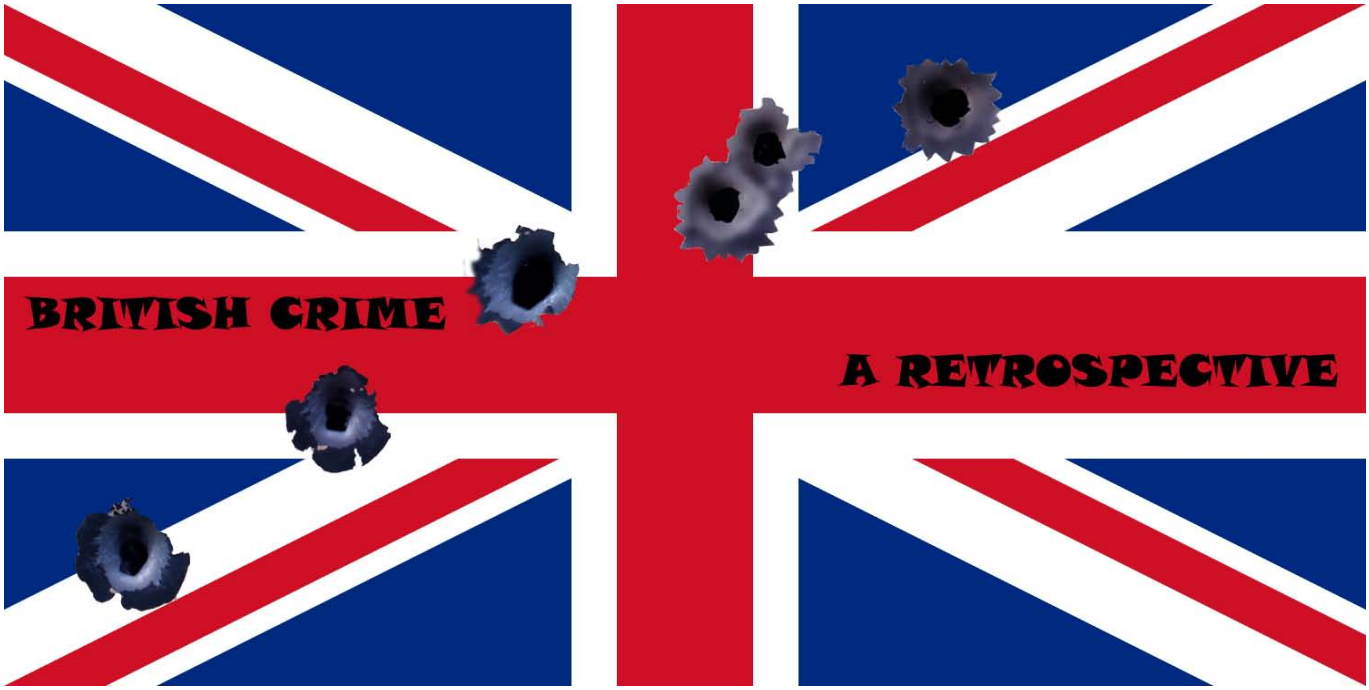
The book is beautifully presented, hard bound and printed on high quality paper that shows the photos to best advantage. David Mearns has academic qualifications but has written the book in a straightforward manner that makes the story easier to follow. His explanations of the technical equipment are clear and concise and he gives his reasoning on his navigational decisions in great detail. The Prologue by Lieutenant John Perryman is a tribute to the ship and the men of both vessels carrying the name HMAS Sydney. There was an HMAS Sydney during World War 1 that fought an engagement with the German commerce raider Emden, forcing it to be scuttled on the Keeling Islands. The second HMAS Sydney of World War 2, the subject of this book, also ran foul of a German commerce raider, the Kormoran. This time the outcome was different.

The book is superbly illustrated but I feel the best picture is the cover one, which shows the sad remains of the Sydney, upper works destroyed and most guns damaged and with the bows blown off by the torpedo hit.



An extra bonus is hidden inside the dust jacket – an A2 size detailed plan of the Sydney's decks as she was fitted out.

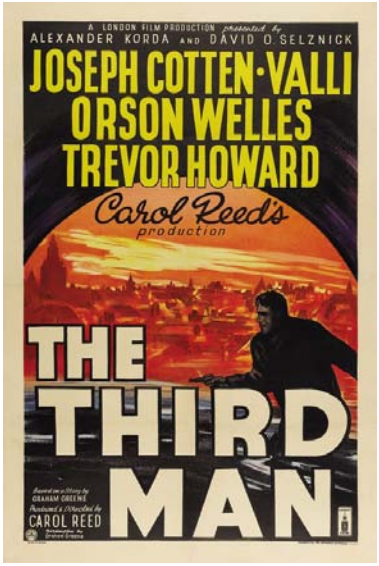
For any lovers of military history or Australian history, this book is a must-have for Christmas.



The British are strangely proud of their criminals. In so many British crime films the criminal is the hero, bravely struggling against other criminals and therefore becoming a goodie, not a baddie. There are exceptions but this seems to be the general trend. The effect of the criminal's actions on the general public is usually glossed over and any violence is directed against their criminal peers. Chibnall and Murphy (1999) have estimated that 26 percent of British films are crime-related so the formula obviously works.

British crime differs strongly from that of other countries. The "hero" is often a solitary figure isolated from other criminals, and often a tragic figure in a Shakespearean sense. Britain never seems to have gone for the large Mafia gangster films of the U.S. and until fairly recently they also avoided the cops-and-robbers style. To have one character carrying the storyline of a film requires good plot and acting but this is something that British directors do well. In the last few years Korean gangster films have tended to follow this path as well.

In the early days the police were often disregarded or at least only played a minor role and most of the action stayed within the criminal community. In the political and economic turmoil between the World Wars this made crime something of a safe, non-threatening film subject. If a crime story required a death, the messy bit would often be over before the story started. The body would be discovered and the story would proceed with a reconstruction and the criminal being found out. Master writers like Agatha Christie seemed to excel at this sort of story, which was more of a detective story than true crime. The criminals, such as they were, were well-mannered and often seemed apologetic that they had to commit a crime. It just wasn't very British somehow to be a real bastard. To carry a gun was unthinkable.



The genre in Britain did eventually come to reflect current social problems and standards. In the 1949 classic The Third Man Harry Lime was a criminal who worked in the black market. He was a thoroughly undesirable person but was less so than the people around him – brutal police, killers and others. By the standards of the time Harry was probably neither good nor bad, but was simply a provider of goods that would otherwise have been unavailable in a time of rationing and shortages. Although the government regarded black marketeers as criminals and disliked films about them, the black market was nevertheless a part of society and many Britons became more tolerant of petty crime as a result. It wasn't really hurting anyone and many people had taken advantage of it.

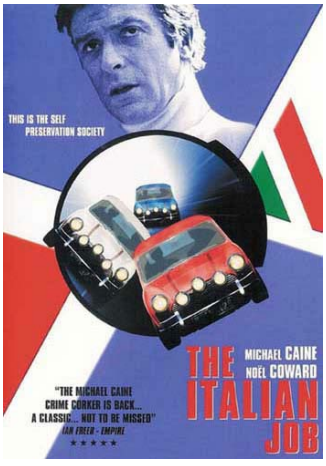
Bob Estreich

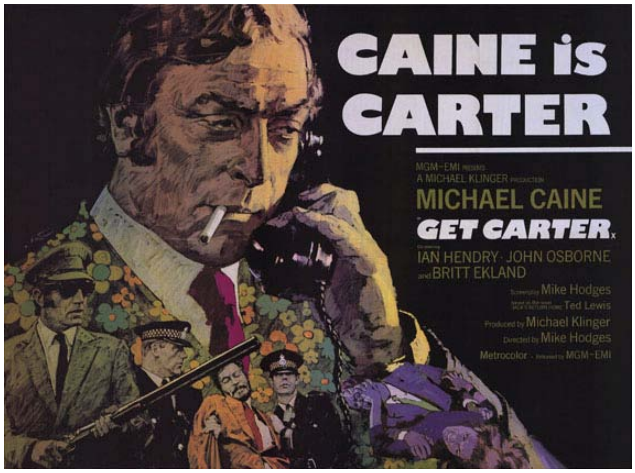
Minder

It is interesting that in 1979 a modernised equivalent of the black marketeer, Arthur Daley, became immensely popular in the TV series *Minder* (1979 – 1994). Arthur dealt in shoddy goods, dodgy imports, used cars – anything he could make a profit from. The scripts carried a comedy edge that made Arthur acceptable to the public, and once again a nasty policeman made Arthur look better by comparison.

Against this we still had those interminable British TV crime shows set in the 20th century up to about World War 2 when one's class was still an important issue. It is hard to believe that a geriatric lady or a pompous Belgian could solve crimes better than the police, but shows like this remain popular even today. Perhaps it's some sort of nostalgia thing, although most viewers now would be too young to remember those days. Agatha Christie has a lot to answer for.

In many post-World War 2 British crime films the comedy touch still made the criminal acceptable. In the 1969 film *The Italian Job* we saw Michael Caine planning a massive gold robbery in Italy, right under the nose of the local mafia. The film was played as a drama and low level comedy. It featured the cheeky British Mini Cooper in the car chase sequences, had a cameo appearance by Noel Coward as a criminal mastermind running his empire from prison, and another cameo by veteran comedian Benny Hill as a computer expert





with a liking for large Italian ladies. It was only the Italians being robbed, so this was apparently acceptable to British tastes at the time.

In a later Michael Caine film, *Get Carter* (1971), we saw a glimpse of the more realistic side of the picture. Jack Carter is a criminal just out of prison who returns to his home town of Newcastle for his brother's funeral. He soon finds that there was more to his brother's death than he thought. Although warned to leave town by the local crime gang he continues his investigation. Carter is a violent man in a brutal environment so the film soon turns savage. His only redeeming feature is that Carter is trying to avenge the murder of his brother. This makes him something of a heroic figure and in this respect the film has more in common with a revenge Western than British crime.

Another excellent (if that's the right word) example of the increasing violence that was creeping into films is Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork* Orange (1971). It deals with small-gang extreme violence and the ability to choose between good and evil. Malcolm McDowell plays Alex, the head of a teenage gang whose main recreations are rape and ultra-violence. They have no redeeming features at all, not even loyalty to each other.

The gang members turn on Alex after he bashes them for having independent ideas, which he sees as a threat to his leadership. He is put in prison for murder. To ease his punish-

A Clockwork Orange

ment he feigns turning to God. The prison chaplain is fooled but the rest of the prison staff still regard him a savage little thug. The government's Interior Minister is also fooled and selects Alex for a new aversion therapy called the Ludovico treatment. It is really a form of government-sponsored torture. Alex is injected with a drug that will make him to feel seriously ill, almost suicidal, at the thought of sex or violence. Held in a straitjacket and with his eyes clamped open he is forced to watch scene after scene of violence and rape until he enters an almost deathlike state.

The aversion therapy works and Alex is released back into society. He runs into his old gang members who are now in the Police Force (on the "set a thief to catch a thief" principle) and they bash him savagely. He is unable to defend himself because of the treatment and is left insensible. This completely reverses the treatment and when he wakes up in hospital he is back to his same old vicious self. He is now, however, a Victim and a hero to the antigovernment forces. The film was powerful and caused a massive outcry about its violence when it was released. There was so much opposition that Kubrick himself pulled the film from distribution in Britain for many years. He handed the rights back to Anthony Burgess, writer of the book on which the film was based and co-writer of the script. Prophetically the film first proposed the idea that the criminal could himself become the victim in the right political climate. In this respect the film A Clockwork Orange stood out as an exception to standard crime films and the public outcry deterred any further attempts at this style of film for a while.

Meanwhile a new class of criminal was being developed. In the James Bond series, starting with *Dr No* in 1962, we saw an increasingly unlikely set of villains, each one a little more quirky (or insane) than the last. They all got their just reward, however, so their goal of world domination was never quite reached. The films were acceptable to the public because they were more like cartoons than serious dramas. Shallow characters and plots, lots of titillation, and an unflappable (British) hero who was really a throwback to earlier male-dominated times were the order of the day. Even when soldiers were sprayed with nerve gas it was OK, because they were only Americans and they all got better anyway.

In the TV show *The Avengers* (1960s) this rather farcical treatment of criminals and crime reached its peak. Played strictly for laughs, the long running series trivialised the whole crime genre to everyone's satisfaction and became a cult even in America. The fairly light-hearted treatment of criminals was possibly responsible

for the general acceptance of crime films in Britain as John Steed, the suave urbane British upper-class type, always saved the day without anyone getting really hurt. He had help from a range of attractive women assistants. Unusually for such a lightweight show and unlike the James Bond films, the women were treated as the equals of their male counterparts in a reflection of changing social attitudes. It has been said that Steed's depiction as the stereotypical English playboy / agent was really so far out of date by now that the women were more believable.

This sort of show kept the viewing public happy for many years but a darker more realistic type of film was gradually emerging. Crime itself was starting to change from the small gangs and single criminals to the serious underworld of organised crime. Even so, it wasn't until 1990 that the market was judged ready for a film about the Kray Brothers, Britain's most notorious and violent gangsters.

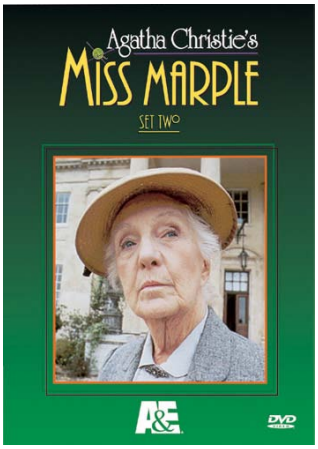
In 1980 *The Long Good Friday* was released. It was possibly the first British film to show international involvement in British crime and so marked something of a coming of age of their film industry. Bob Hoskins starred as Harold Shand, a gangster who is trying to negotiate a deal with an American crime syndicate to get a part of the action in the great London Docklands redevelopment. The overseas money men are dealing with Shand because he has subverted or terrorised the local police and politicians and thus will have a lot of influence on who gets the project. Unfortunately the Americans are becoming nervous because someone is attacking Shand's gang members. Bombs are going off in Shand's various operations and even his mother is targeted.

One of Shand's gangsters has been doing a bit of work on the side against the IRA and they believe Shand is behind it. While Shand bemoans the loss of respect for church, Britain, and his own position as a gang boss he must

deal with the IRA before they deal with him. He meets the local leaders and in a poorly planned but predictable move he has them killed. The IRA will not leave it there, since it is now very personal, and Shand is in turn dealt with.

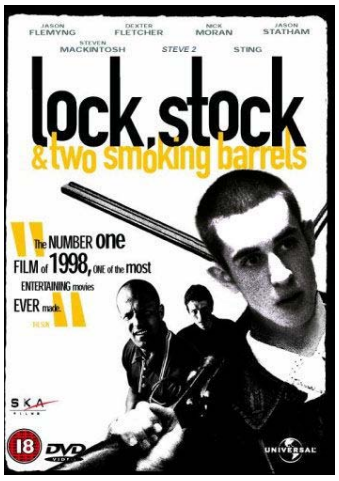
One of the first attempts to show the criminal as a social undesirable in the general community is the long-running Thames TV show The Bill (broadcast regularly from 1984 and still in production, although now getting a little more like a soap opera). Initially this followed the careers of a number of new policemen seconded to Sun Hill, a London suburb. The show looked at areas like juvenile crime, drugs, racial tension and the future problems caused by the huge housing developments packing too many unemployed people in too small a space. Finally a show was sympathetic to the police and the criminals were not heroes. The seedy and often nasty side of lower-class life was demonstrated and the criminals were generally a reflection of a society that had no use for them. It was this depiction of the effect of crime on the general public that made The Bill so realistic.

Although *Miss Marple* and *Hercule Poirot* still attracted audiences, as did many other TV shows set in the gentler past, it was The Bill that got the audiences. Perhaps Britain was now ready for a more realistic look at criminals?



They bypassed the American type of gangster film and went for a home-grown style that allowed for stronger characterisations.

Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels.



In 1998 Guy Ritchie released *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. A group of working lads has lost a lot of money in a crooked card game run by a local crime boss, and they have a week to raise the money or start losing body parts. They overhear their next door neighbours, an inept group of minor criminals, planning to steal money and drugs from local drug growers. They decide the only way to get the money they need is for them to become criminals and in turn steal the money from the next door group. What could possibly go wrong?

Everything. The drug growers are supplying another local criminal gang who want the thieves who stole their drugs dead. The gang next door wants to find out who ripped them off and wants them dead as well. The film is played with a certain rough and slightly humorous style but the criminals are a thoroughly nasty lot. The British in their comedies tend to lampoon those who aspire to a higher social status, but what about those who decide to lower their social position and become criminals?

The film quickly achieved cult status, helped by the tortuous multistranded plot and great acting.

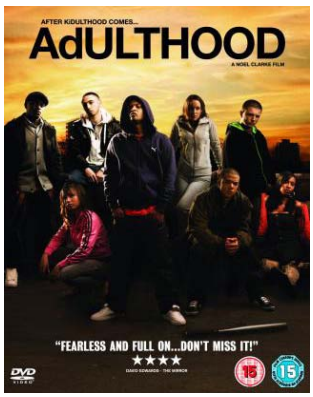
The most memorable character was undoubtedly the enforcer with a cold, efficient style, played by Vinnie Jones. This type of film has been called "Gangster Light".

Ritchie followed Lock Stock in 2000 with *Snatch*. Once again the "hero", Turkish, is of the lower classes and on the fringes of crime. He is involved in illegal bare-knuckle boxing matches. He accidentally becomes involved with Bricktop, an evil schoolmasterly arch-villain and promoter of rigged boxing matches who owns a herd of man-eating pigs – a convenient way to dispose of inconvenient bodies. Turkish's boxer is injured by a local gypsy bare-knuckle boxer, brilliantly played by Brad Pitt of all people. Since the gypsy is now to replace their boxer in the coming match, Bricktop decides to encourage him by burning down his mother's caravan with her still inside. The gypsies' revenge is bloody and brutal. Throw in subplots of stolen diamonds, a dog that has swallowed a squeaky rubber toy, inept and shady pawnshop dealers, and once again Vinnie Jones, and you have all the ingredients for a top film.

Against the Guy Ritchie slightly humorous style other films were being produced that were more gritty and realistic. This type of film, with its strong violence and powerful but tragic characters has been called "Gangster Heavy".

One of the better ones is the little known *Essex Boys*. Billy is just out of prison and finds a job driving one of the local crime bosses. His brother is trying to work his way up the gang hierarchy by doing a gun importing deal on the side. This displeases his boss, who is also having trouble with his drugs importer. Billy finds himself caught between the three. It is a film of double cross, murder and violence. Billy is just trying to stay out of the way and avoid the police but he is going to be in the thick of it whichever way he turns. The film is also noteworthy for its strong female characters who take a major part in the plot.

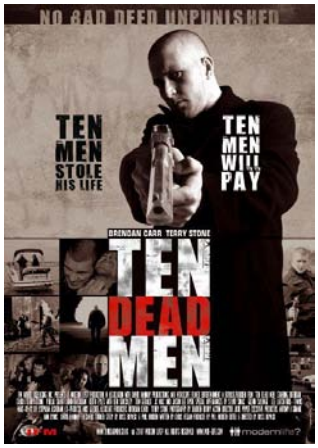
Another recent contribution to criminal films is from new independent producer Noel Clarke. In his second major film *Adulthood* Sam is just out of prison and wants a quiet life. Unfortunately, back in his old neighbourhood, he must face the people he hurt by his crimes. He must also face his previous rival who now runs the old gang and believes Sam is out to get him for putting Sam in prison.



Although some people can forgive Sam there will be a lot of bloodshed before it's all over. This is perhaps the most realistic British criminal film of recent years. There is nothing glamorous or heroic about Sam - he is a victim of his own crimes and has been beaten into submission by his time in prison. He is ill-prepared for the consequences of his earlier acts.

Crime films are now tending to divide into two areas – police fighting criminals, and criminals fighting other criminals. They are done with a different style and set of values to those of other countries. The old Shakespearean tradition of the tragic hero still surfaces from time to time.

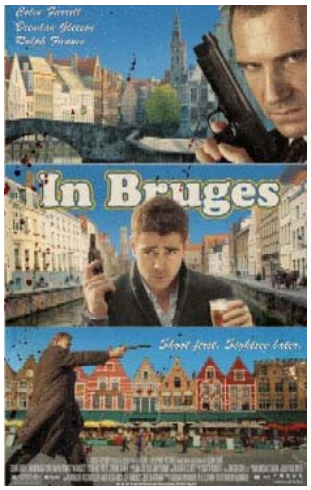
Ten Dead Men (2008) is a classic tragic hero / revenge film. Ryan is a retired hit man for a criminal gang. He is called on to help an old friend with one last job that goes horribly wrong. Ryan's girlfriend is killed in punishment and he is beaten, shot and left for dead.



He sets out to exact revenge. Ten men destroyed everything he loved, now ten men must die. Ryan is obviously doomed but he doesn't care as he has nothing further to lose. This low budget independent film returned to the old style of *Get Carter*. Like that film, Ryan gains our sympathy by his honourable attempt at retribution. The film is bloody and murderous and would have to be carefully sanitised before release in the U.S.

Is there a future for British crime?

In the sense of a purely British film, probably the future belongs to the independents. They can better handle low budgets and are less frightened of new ideas, extreme violence and controversial plot elements. With the increasing internationalisation of films we are more likely to see crime films of the nature of *In Bruges* (2008) using British actors and directors on locations like Belgium where it is less expensive to film.



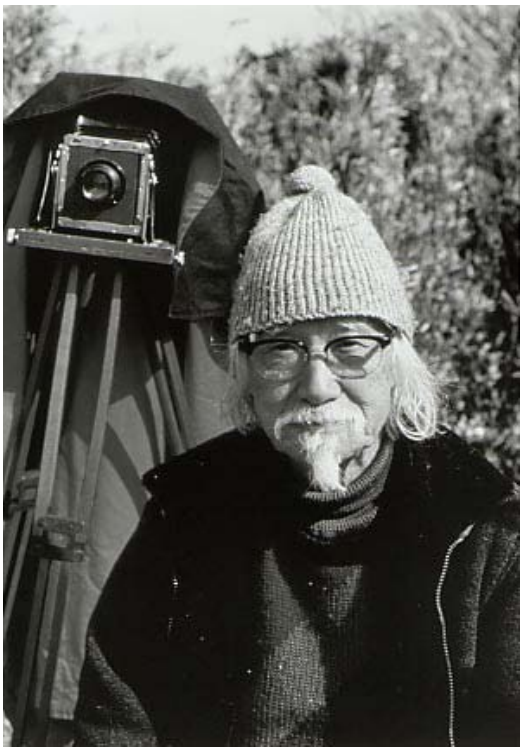
The increasing use of CGI for special effects will mean more work contracted out overseas. Finally, the changing tastes of the public will divert money from crime films into blockbusters like *Harry Potter*. In spite of these negatives British crime will still stay alive while ever there is a British director with imagination and a camera.

THE UNUSUAL WORLD OF JAPANESE CRIME NOIR:

THE WORK OF SUZUKI SEIJUN

With directors such as Quentin Tarantino, Wong Kar-wai and Jim Jarmusch citing director Seijun Suzuki as one of their major influences, Suzuki Seijun is a name to be reckoned with when it comes to Japanese Crime cinema.

Seijun Suzuki was born on May 24th 1923. He had a fairly typical early life and education of the period and was recruited by the Imperial Japanese Army during the national student mobilization to serve in World War II like so many others. What was unique was his take on the war. He certainly had little stomach for rabble rousing and remarked in *Mijn werk—My Work* (Suzuki, Seijun January 1991), that "*... I stayed in the army out of fear of being executed as a deserter"*.



At the same time he developed a dark and surreal sense of humour in relation to the events unfolding around him. Perhaps as a buffer to the violence and death that he saw, he laughed at the darkest of events from the strange sound of the bugler blasting his trumpet every time a coffin was thrown into the sea to people running off deck during a bombing raid!

Returning from war he enrolled into the film department of the Kamakura academy and in 1948 passed the Shochiku Company's entrance exam being hired as assistant director in the Ōfuna Studio. There he worked under directors Minora Shibuya, Yasushi Sasaki, Noboru Nakamura and Oniwa Hideo before joining the regular crew of Tsuruo Iwama. The path to becoming a director is a long one and when the Nikkatsu Company started poaching assistant directors from other companies with the promise of a short journey to fame, Suzuki was seduced.

The Nikkatsu Company is Japan's oldest film studio, formed in 1912 by the merger of four smaller companies. The company employed such notable film directors as Shozo Makino and his son Masahiro Makino with Akira Kurosawa starting his career there in the 1930s as an assistant director. During the war it was close to dormant but when it reopened its door in 1954 it was on a path to success. Suzuki was hired and worked under Hidesuke Takizawa, Kiyoshi Saeki, So Yamamura and Hiroshi Noguchi. His first screenplay to make it to the big screen was *Duel at Sunset* (1955) directed by Hiroshi Noguchi. It certainly was a quick path to directorship; he became a director in his own right in 1956.

Like any Japanese film studio Nikkatsu made its share of Samurai and period films, but by the 1960s they found their niche in urban, action and yakuza films (gangster/crime films). From the late 1950s to the earlier Seventies they were renowned for their big budget yakuza films employing such stars as Yujiro Ishihara, Akira Kobayashi, Joe Shishido, Tetsuya Watari, Ruriko Asaoka, Chieko Matsubara, Meiko Kaji and Tatsuya Fuji.

Suzuki made forty or so B-movies for the Nikkatsu Company between 1956 and 1967, primarily in the urban youth and yakuza genres. While his style began fairly conservatively as his confidence increased his work developed an

unusual visual style, a dark nihilism and was marked by a strange approach to plot which featured an emphasis on style and mood over logic. He is revered by many as a pioneer of "pop-art" cinema with work that is suave and cool celebrating style over substance.

His increasingly surreal style caused conflict with the studio and led to his dismissal in 1963. "*They told me my films didn't make money and they didn't make sense, so they fired me*", Suzuki stated in a recent interview. Amazed that he was dismissed over *Branded to Kill* which is now seen as his most significant work, hailed by critics and heralded as a cult classic. It must be said, however, that at the time it was box office disaster and the public were polarized.

An ongoing legal battle ensued with much of the case aired in the press. Finally in 1971 he received damages and an apology, but it resulted in a studio backlash and he was essentially blacklisted.

To keep himself financial viable during the lengthy legal battle Suzuki published various books of essays and directed television movies, series and commercials.

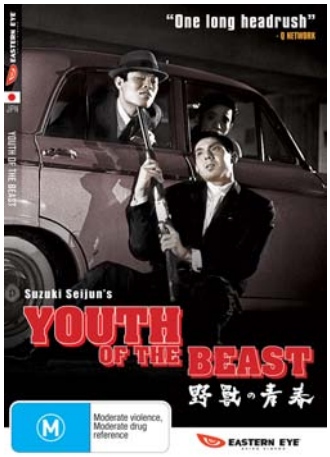
He also began acting in bit parts. His first credited screen role was an appearance in Kazuki Omori's *Don't Wait Until Dark!* (1975)

As an independent filmmaker he produced *Tales of Sorrow and Sadness* (1977) which proved a failure. He regained his footing with a period-based ghost trilogy named after a gramophone recording of gypsy violin music by Pablo de Sarasate which featured prominently in the film (*Zigeunerweisen* (1980), *Kagero-za* (1981) and *Yumeji* (1991). The series won critical acclaim and a Japanese Academy Award.

His films remained widely unknown outside of Japan, except for copies circulated by film buffs. However in the mid-Eighties there were theatrical showings in the West and then with the video revolution (and later DVD) his films began to reach a much wider audience.

Tributes started to flow from such cult luminaries as Quentin Tarantino and his reputation was set in gold. He still makes films occasionally but today is more commonly known as an actor.

Youth of the Beast (1963)



Youth of the Beast is considered the pivotal film in Suzuki's career, it was with this film that he moved beyond the formula firms that Nikkatsu were demanding and began to develop his own unique, if not at times avant-garde, style. While his style first really takes precedence in *Tokyo Drifter* and reaches its zenith in *Branded to Kill*, this film still shows his trademark editing, landscape cinematography, use of unusual colour palettes and zany twists of plot.

Jo is a brazen gangster; he arrives seemingly out of nowhere in Tokyo and walks into Nomoto Enterprizes, a local yakuza gang headquarters. He confronts the guards and kicks the shit out of them, points a gun at the boss and demands a job; needless to say, he makes quite an impression. He asks a hefty price but is employed on the spot, admired for his tenacity and clout.

The gang is at war with a rival gang, so Joe brazenly goes to the rival gang's headquarters and does the same thing! Playing each side off against each other, feeding information and creating havoc, he makes lots of money but is playing a very risky game.

Jo, on the surface, sees to be simply a manipulative, if not psychopathic thug, but he has a secret past and is manipulating the gangs towards his own goals. This is a tale of strange alliances, hidden motivations and obscure characters.

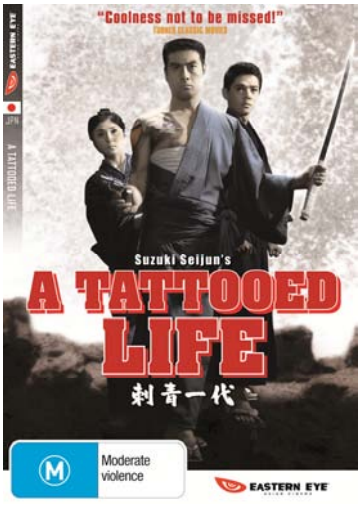
Why is Jo's partner more interested in guns than in women? Why does Hide, the notorious gay gangster, always slash the face of anyone who mentions his mother? What does this all have to do with the Takeshita School of Knitting?

Youth of the Beast Images ©
1963 Nikkatsu Corporation All Rights reserved

All of these questions will be answered in this stylish and strange film which is marked by dream-like sequences, pop art cinematography and images which are both sublime and outrageous at the same time.

Youth of the Beast is an action-packed visual feast which literally explodes onto the screen within the first minute and keeps up a frenzied pace until the credits roll.

A Tattooed Life (1965)



A Tattooed Life was really the start of Suzuki's problems. While achieving critical acclaim it lost a lot of cash for Nikkatsu and he received his first warning that his career would be cut short if he wouldn't toe the line. He didn't and was fired some two years later.

Tetsu is a yakuza henchman who finally snaps after seeing the constant back-stabbing degradation of a rival clan's code of conduct. He kills the rival clan's boss and has his last target in the site of his gun when his younger brother Kenji appears on the scene.

As Tetsu attempts to explain, the clan member attacks and now the Tetsu is left in a dilemma. He must decide between his own safety and protecting his younger brother; worse, they are being tailed by the vengeful partners of his last hit.

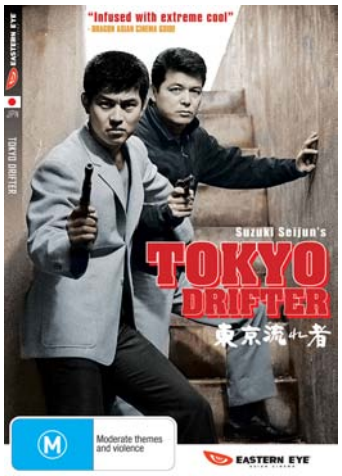
Together they flee to a small, isolated mining settlement in Manchuria hoping to hide from the police and find work.

The mining town is not as peaceful as it seems. The workers all seem to have criminal backgrounds and are using their roles as part of a team burrowing into the mountainside for a new train line as a way to stay beyond the reach of the law.

When his younger brother becomes obsessed with the boss's wife, things get truly out of hand.

This is a fascinating film, now celebrated for its mixture of Bushido and yakuza elements. It is filled with guns, knives, fisticuffs, explosives and lots of swords. It is, of course, marked by Suzuki's unique style and presentation.

Tokyo Drifter (1966)



Kurata is an old and tired Yakuza whose only wish is to go straight and become a legitimate businessman.

He has disbanded his gang but Tetsu was the right-hand man and continues to stand behind him.

Of course a life of crime is hard to leave behind and when an old foe arrives in the form of Aizawa, Kurata is back to his old way. Aizawa works to stop Kurata at every chance even trying to get Tetsu to swap sides, but loyalty is paramount in the underworld.

When Aizawa threatens to put a stranglehold on Kurata's desire for a legitimate business life or kill him in the process, the stage is set for Tetsu, the Tokyo Drifter, to step up and set wrongs right.

Tokyo Drifter is made by the stunning performance of Tetsuya Watari. Suave and ever so cool he drifts from scene to scene without any-

A Tattooed Life Images ©
1965 Nikkatsu Corporation All Rights reserved

Tokyo Drifter Images ©
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thing getting under his skin. Watari portrays the character as being a mix of Samurai and loyal gangster, a strange mix indeed. While he may wish to leave behind the yakuza life, he also knows he has a job to do.

Watari's performance is matched by the amazing fluid cinematography of the film, beautiful, eccentric and polished. At the same time the background is filled with fascinating characters, lots of humour and a startling plot.

It also has one of the most incredible bar brawls ever put to celluloid. If you have not seen a Seijun Suzuki film before this is a great place to start.

Branded to Kill (1967)

Branded to Kill is considered Suzuki's master work; it was also so unusual that it cost him his job and nearly ended his career. It is a beautiful film, with breathtaking cinematography and a truly masterful use of light and shadow.

It has a jazz score and nearly every scene is marked with bizarre and unusual images. Today it is considered a significant work of absurdist cinema. However, regardless of its importance, it is at times, incomprehensible and must be approached with an appreciation of the uniqueness of the style and a willingness to explore a different approach to cinema.

The story concerns Hanada, also known as Number 3 Killer, a yakuza assassin who is

stylish, wears shades and is sexually excited by the smell of boiling rice. He is approached by the beautiful and equally deadly Misako to undertake a nearly impossible mission where he must 'kill or be killed'. Misako is an unusual character to say the least, her bedroom is full of dead butterflies and she has an impaled starling dangling from the rear view mirror of her car!

Sadly Number 3 Killer screws up the job due to a terrible accident, a butterfly lands on the barrel of his gun just as he is about to complete his contract. Now his girlfriend has been hired by the mob boss to kill him. It is now a wild battle between assassin and assassin until the final confrontation with the anonymous Number 1.

This is a truly startling work with amazing staged action scenes, set pieces and an amazing mixture of styles, ranging from James Bond to Film Noir, which creates what is considered the pinnacle of Suzuki's work. The plot to Branded to Kill is so involved and has so many twists and turns you will need to watch it numerous times to truly appreciate the depth of the story. It really is one of the few classic films of Japanese Crime Noir and is an absolute must see.

Some thirty-four years after *Branded to Kill*, Suzuki made *Pistol Opera* (2001) with Nikkatsu, a sequel. The company has also hosted two major retrospectives spotlighting his career putting the past behind them.

Madman Entertainment has released a superb collection of his films both as individual titles and as a set.

Visit Madman Entertainment www.madman.com.au for further information.

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CRIME FOR XMAS

The Baader-Meinhoff Complex
2008
Historical drama
Icon
R4 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

The Baader-Meinhoff Gang, otherwise known as the Red Army Faction, was post-War Germany's introduction to terrorism. At first rather widely supported by Germans as an anti-American group, its brutal acts soon led it to being viewed as just a bunch of thugs and gunmen. How did it happen? In an austere Germany that was just glad the War was over and was making a good job of recovery, how did this group rise to any sort of power? This film dramatises the events but gives us a good look at the history.

The film starts with Ulrike Meinhoff, a thirtyish journalist with two daughters. She believed, like many Germans, that the U.S. bases in Germany would make it a target in a nuclear war. That war appeared to be growing closer as America escalated the Vietnam war. She also had a social conscience that was stirred up when the Shah of Iran visited Germany. Iran is one of the richest countries yet its people are some of the poorest, and she wrote an open letter to the Shah's wife criticising her media comments. German students were against the Shah's visit and in a noisy demonstration they were savagely attacked and beaten by the police. One was shot. Ulrike pointed out that this was the sort of police state action that brought the Nazis to power. She was noticed by some of the more militant students and regarded as an ally.

Rudi Dutchske, a student leader, was gaining support for political pressure against the government. The scenes of his speech are disturbingly similar to a Hitler rally. He was shot by a disaffected student and the balance of power shifted in the protest movement to Andreas Baader. Baader was no Dutschke - he advocated more direct action like bombing, but as his character evolves through the film we see he was little more than an arrogant, swaggering thug. He didn't care for the political concerns, preferring to live a wild life as a psychopath. He was a natural leader though and he attracted a small but loyal following. The political side was handled by his promiscuous girlfriend Gudrun who could turn anything into a political slogan, giving Baader the "respectability" to be a revolutionary rather than a criminal.

Ulrike wavered about joining the group but doing so would mean she would lose her daughters forever. When Baader was arrested by the police on a simple speeding charge, she helped him escape. On a spur of the moment decision she joined his small inner circle. They escaped to a terrorist training camp in the middle east but Baader decided he would return to Germany and take up bank robbery to support his terrorist activities. A wave of robberies followed and the German government and police had to take notice. One by one gang members were taken by the police or killed, and Ulrike could only put this down to a lack of clear planning by Baader. He refused to scout out each city where he would operate, he blamed the individuals for their capture, and he became increasingly irrational. Ulrike meanwhile continued to write propaganda for the group and her name was now associated with Baader's as one of the gang's leaders.

Their targets were changing – they now

bombed police stations, the judges who sentenced their members, and U.S. buildings. The police finally organised an ambitious plan. They sealed off the entire city of Frankfurt. They checked all cars at roadblocks, checked citizens' papers, and generally made it impossible to move in the city without an identity check. Since the gang was using false papers it should be possible to intercept them. The plan worked. With over a hundred thousand extra police in the city three of the remaining gang members were arrested or shot including Baader. With the whole city now on terrorist alert Ulrike changed her appearance and tried to escape. She was recognised by a shop assistant and arrested. There was no escape for most of the others, either. This time the police state worked against them.

The end of the gang should be the end of the film, but in a final irony it covers the murder of Israeli athletes at the Berlin Olympics as a terrorist act by the very people who were the victims at the start of the film. The public attitude hardened against the prisoners. The gang members were left in prison pending their trial. Holger Meins, one of the gang, died as a result of a hunger strike. He was not given any medical attention, but the gang members asserted that he was executed by the police The judge who sentenced him was assassinated the next day.

The remaining members and new reinforcements organised a takeover of the German embassy in Stockholm. It ended with an attack on the embassy by Danish police, who shot one of the gang and killed five more. The injured terrorist was shipped back to Germany for trial. The prisoners were shocked – their last chance to avoid prison had been aborted. After three years in gaol the trial began. Ulrike declared herself mentally incompetent to stand trial, but the judge was unsympathetic. She continued her political writing but it was becoming irrational, like her. She was on the verge of insanity. Gudrun remained strong and proudly confessed the group's crimes to the court. She and Baader made a circus of the trial and provided good entertainment to the crowd of spectators each day. Still the revenge attacks continued by a new third wave of the group. The Chief Prosecutor was executed in his car. A banker was killed in a bungled kidnapping. The judge was ambushed and kidnapped. A plane was hijacked and passengers were to be killed if the gang was not released. As country after country rejected sanctuary for the gang, the plane finally flew to Mogadishu. When interviewed by police Baader said he didn't even know this third generation of the gang personally, but that his gang would not have targeted innocent civilians. It seems the new breed of terrorist is more like Baader himself was– amoral and using politics as a justification for wanton violence,

Finally, in a coordinated action, some of the imprisoned terrorists including Baader committed suicide. With their deaths there was no longer be any excuse for the gang to continue. Finally they realised they had been living a lie and the "suicides" were, in fact, just that.

The film is excellent for its development of the feel of the 1960s – 1970s period. The concern of the German people is well expressed with broadcasts and TV footage of the riots and bombings cut into the story. Unfortunately the film is overlong and suffers towards the end from new characters being introduced without explanation or introduction.

Terrorism has for a long time been regarded as a Moslem action, but films like this remind us that it is not so. Other home grown terrorists like the Italian Red Brigade or the Irish Republican Army were every bit as bad. Often during the film the police chief remarks that the only way to stop the terrorism is to understand what the terrorists want and to remove the conditions that make terrorism necessary. No one listens or understands.

The film is in German with English subtitles.

Gomorrah
Madman 2009
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Gomorrah is five parallel stories about the criminal gang that runs the Naples underworld. The gang is known as the Camorra. In many ways similar to the U.S Mafia, they have fingers in many pies – drugs, toxic waste disposal, gun running, etc. There are rival gangs fighting for control of the depressed areas, the old public housing slums.

The first thread of the story is of Toto, a 13-year-old who has decided that the only way out of his poverty is to join a gang. He does not quite realise what this involves until he is called on to lead a woman that he knows into an execution trap.

Franco is a respectable-looking businessman whose specialty is hiring old quarries on good farming land for the illegal disposal of toxic waste. He knows he is poisoning the farming land and its people but is completely amoral about it.

Pasquale is a tailor working for a sweatshop firm. He finds he can make more money by teaching the rival Chinese. The Camorra will not stand for this as they make their cut from the Italian firm and feel rather protective about those they parasite off.

Marco and Ciro, a pair of foolish amateurs, decide to steal guns from one of the gangs and start their own crime empire. The Camorra will not stand for this, either, and the result is predictable.

Don Ciro is an "accountant" who pays out a little money on behalf of the gang to the families of those gang members who are currently imprisoned. He is basically a coward, but he is forced to choose sides when warfare breaks out with a splinter gang in an attempt to save his own life. Will he choose right? These stories are unrelated, simply serving as demonstrations of the Camorra's grip on the Naples underworld. They are only seen as part of the whole problem when the statistics are presented at the end of the film – four thousand murders in the last thirty years, drug earnings by one gang estimated at half a million Euros a day. Roberto Saviano's book has been well transferred to film, with no particular gloss added.

There is a fair amount of violence but it is in no way glorified. There are no heroes in this film. It is a grim film of people just trying to get on with life. Some manage, some adapt, some die. It is not a nice film but it is compelling.

Jack Says (2008)
Crime Drama
Anchor Bay
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Jack Says is a fine drama in the best British traditions. Although it is an independent production it has the quality acting and production values we have come to expect from the British without any superficial gloss. It is based on a graphic novel and the style has carried through to the film – dark, little colour and a series of rapidly changing moments rather than a slow steady development.

Jack is a low level gangster, not much more than hired muscle. He is known to the police but they are more interested in his boss, the Guvnor (Mike Reid's last performance). As the story opens Jack (Simon Phillips) is tied to a chair while being savagely beaten by other thugs from the gang. The Guvnor is lecturing him about "respect" and it appears that Jack may have been flirting with Natalie, the Guvnor's daughter. The Guvnor takes a gun, holds it to Jack's head, and as the picture fades to black for the titles we hear two gunshots.

Jack wakes up in a toilet block next to the Guvnor's body. Police sirens are approaching so he instinctively flees. He has lost his memory and all he has to go on is his name on a credit card and some other ID and a Polaroid photo of a pair of breasts with the name "Erin" and a Paris address scribbled on the back. He leaves Britain just ahead of the police and goes to Paris to lie low and to track Erin down.

Erin is the sister of one of Jack's friends in his previous life. They were in love but Jack's criminal involvements meant he left her to work for the gang and then became involved with the rather psychotic Natalie. Erin is reluctant to get involved with Jack again but at least she shelters him for the night. Her old feelings for him reawaken. She fills in some of the gaps in his previous life and will tell him more the next day when she returns from work.

Filling in time, Jack visits a local night club that evening where he becomes interested in a singer named Girl X. It seems that Jack is a bit of a womaniser and he visits her dressing room in time to see Garvey, the club's woman owner, leaving the room. Garvey obviously has lesbian designs on Girl X. One of Garvey's thugs visits her with a ring and teeth belonging to a man Garvey believes she was flirting with in the bar. Jack beats up the thug and Girl X asks him to kill Garvey – it's the only way out of her predicament since Garvey has some sort of hold over her. Jack doesn't think he is a killer and refuses.

Back with Erin it appears Jack may be about to make it up with her. He finds that she is also pregnant, apparently to him. He takes the news well but when he gets back to the flat next evening he finds Erin has been stabbed to death. Distraught, he agrees to take on Girl X 's offer to kill Garvey. It all goes wrong and Jack is taken by Garvey's thugs and once again beaten almost senseless. The savage beating revives his dormant memories. He realises he has simply been used throughout his life and now sets out for revenge.

The story is gradually revealed to us through a series of flashbacks as Jack's memories return. Normally I don't like flashbacks as they tend to make a story disjointed but here it all works well. The flashbacks keep us up to date with Jack's returning memories and fill in his character. Meanwhile the suspense is carried on as the story develops.

It is hard to feel sympathy with most of the characters except Erin. They are simply exploiting Jack for their own ends and he, being a follower rather than a leader, has meekly allowed himself to be led deep into trouble. In the end this approach has led to him being betrayed by those few "friends" he had and the one woman who still loves him for himself is dead.

There is not a bad performance in the entire film. The quality acting carries the film, not glitzy tourist shots of Paris. Directors Bob Komar and Simon Phillips have put most of the action indoors and the harsh almost black and white lighting through much of the film sets the mood perfectly. There is one "normal" outside shot where Jack and Erin are returning from a night out but the natural evening lighting seems almost artificial in the context of the film. The film is everything I have come to expect from British drama – good plot, good acting, gritty story and well directed and produced.

Kriminal (Criminal)
Umberto Lenzi
DVD-R
Cinema De Bizarre

Kriminal (aka *La Mascara de Kriminal*) is a superb crime/Giallo action tale from the master filmmaker Umberto Lenzi, who is primarily remembered for *Cannibal Ferox*, which is a shame as this is a real winner. The origins of the Kriminal character can be found in the 1964 comic book of the same name created by Roberto Raviola and Luciano Secchi using the pseudonyms Magnus and Max Bunker. *Kriminal* (1966) is the first of two films, it was followed two years later by *Il marchio di Kriminal* (1968). It is a very significant film as film critics see that it was the inspiration for Mario Bava's *Danger Diabolik* which is still believed to be the very epitome of stylish crime cinema.

Kriminal is a very different sort of anti-hero, he is a dark James Bond, who dresses like a skeleton and uses whatever means necessary to get to his goal. He does not "steal from the rich to give to the poor" but simply steals because it is in his nature. He is amoral, attractive and talented. He effortlessly seduces women if the desire so takes him and kills without a second thought, normally with quite some panache. He is sly and mischievous, killing a woman in her sauna and making it look like a heart attack and putting acid in a shaving cream bottle to disfigure a rival, the latter being part of his larger plan to take his victim's identity and steal some diamonds.

The film opens as Kriminal is on death row being prepared for execution, however, there is a hitch, he has stolen the crown jewels and they cannot be found! When he escapes execution, he gives the police following him the slip, returns the crown and moves onto a new caper.

The whole feel of *Kriminal* is unique, he is such

an unusual character, we want to like him and yet he is so utterly narcissistic and beyond any standard of normal morality. The skeleton suite he wears gives him a real gothic touch. It is tight and body hugging, extenuating his beauty but at the same time makes him strangely deathlike. When he climbs into Alex's house to steal a key he is like some sort of demonic Spiderman crawling up the edges of a wall in the dead of night. This may be a comic book figure but not the sort of saccharine Hollywood hero we are used to, this is a dark, brooding dangerous character who is always one step ahead of the law.

The cinematography is impressive with marvelous locations in London, Madrid and Istanbul. The exoticism of Istanbul matched with the beauty of the woman and the high rolling parties and casinos give it a superbly cosmopolitan feel. The score by Romano Mussolini is jazzy and groovy and makes this a real Sixties classic.

While not strictly defined as a Giallo, it comes pretty close. It is a crime thriller with all sorts of twists and turns including a rather nice sub plot involving identical twin sisters (who are identically beautiful since they are both played by Helga Liné) involved in a diamond heist. The way in which everyone has their own agenda and no-one can be trusted being ready to double cross everybody else at the drop of a hat makes this a very entertaining and action packed work of cinema.

Strangely this is a very hard to find film, we were lucky to discover an excellent DVD-R edition from Cinema De Bizarre, The print is very clear, the score and dialogue has excellent clarity. The subtitles are in solid white and very easy to read.

Cinema De Bizarre have a wide range of rare and obscure titles which are impossible to find anywhere else, visit them at:

Web: http://cinema-de-bizarre.com

Spiral:
Series 1 & 2
2005
France
Distributed in Australia by SBS
Madman Entertainment
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

French with clear English subtitles

Spiral (French Title: *Engrenages*) is a crime/ police Drama from France, Series 1 and 2 are available from Madman Entertainment.

I have an increasing respect for French drama producers. They manage to produce films that contain all the action you could want but still give attention to the traditional film values like a strong plot and good characterisation. They manage effective drama without excessive violence or stunts. This TV series is a good example.

In Series One the badly mutilated body of a young, probably attractive girl is found dumped on a rubbish tip. Her face has been destroyed to hide her identity. Newly promoted Police Captain Laure Bathaud (Caroline Proust) is in charge of the case. Her work is overseen by handsome young Assistant Prosecutor Pierre Clement (Gregory Fitoussi) and they both report to the ageing but brilliant Judge Roban (Phillipe Duclos).

As the investigation proceeds it moves further out into the world of drugs, prostitution, illegal immigrants and political influence. Prosecutor Clement finds that a lifelong friend is not all he seems, and is forced to balance justice against friendship. The spiral widens as powerful politicians and industry leaders are caught up in the case. Their vices and perversions are being laid bare and some will not tolerate this.

There are personal problems, too. Captain Bathaud is attracted to the married but about-to-be-separated Prosecutor Clement. One of her squad of police officers is involved in drugs himself.

Captain Bathaud is under pressure in court from an ambitious young female lawyer, Miss Karlsson, who is fronting illegally for a disbarred solicitor. As Bathaud's cases develop, she finds them spiraling inwards now towards the main case of the murdered girl. So are the group's personal problems. So, it seems, is much of the Paris underworld.

There are differences between the French justice system and the British system. Ours is based on the "adversarial" system where a prosecutor and a defence present their cases before a Judge, who makes the final decision.

The French Inquisitorial system gives the Judge the power to effectively direct a case, order investigations, and find out the truth before the case goes to a court before a judge and jury.

The Judge is therefore a very powerful man in the French system. The series takes the time to show this, and gives each actor plenty of time to show the relationship between the levels of justice.

The directors of the various episodes all seem to have shared a common vision and the episodes integrate seamlessly. This is critically important where the characterisations must continue across all the episodes. The French writers are to be congratulated for their careful construction and continuity of the main players.

The series was so well received on its initial release that it received an unusual accolade – BBC4 picked it up for screening. The British audience loved it and it is now being rescreened. A second series has been produced and there are rumours of a third. The series has also been shown in Australia by SBS, who did the subtitling. They are experts at this and the subtitles are clear and well translated.

In the second series Captain Bathaud is investigating the case of a man's body found in the trunk of a burnt-out car. In criminal circles he has been "barbecued". Again, the spiral widens to include powerful people, higher level criminals and the disbarred solicitor. Miss Karlsson, his young protégé, finally realises she is working for criminals and must decide between her zeal for the law and the money to be illegally made. She still has Laure Bathaud in her sights.

Again, we get a range of other cases to show the French justice system at work and again, the cases seem to be spiralling inwards as the crimes and the people are shown to be involved with one another.

A word of warning if you are looking for this DVD. There are two other Spiral DVDs out there. One is an Anime film, the other is a U.S. production. Neither are connected with this film.

Ten 'Til Noon
Sony (2007)
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

I finally got around to watching this rather underrated drama. Now I'm sorry I waited so long. It really is a superb piece of dark suspense.

Between 11:50 a.m. and noon a number of people's lives are going to change. We start with the killing of a business executive for an unexplained reason and progress towards the explanation over that same time period, character by character, as the background and plot develop.

There are double-crosses, sex, murders, hired killers, and maybe just a little love and compassion. The explanation is always just that little bit further away, so we go on to the next character for the next bit of information.

Director Scott Storm doles this out sparingly and we still don't quite understand until the last segment – and even then the very last scene throws our understanding into doubt again. I can't say much more about the plot without giving it away, but it's edge-of-the-seat all the way.

There are many powerful performances. Alfonso Freeman is superb as Mr Jay, the suave hired killer who likes to play with his victim's emotions first, but Paul Alessi as the bodyguard / killer/ cleanup man is more menacing in his quiet emotionless efficiency.

Writer Paul Osborne has given each character a role they can really work with and it's a pity that many of their appearances are fairly short. Even a minor role like Jenya Lano's Miss Milch (Mr Jay's offsider) is played to perfection.

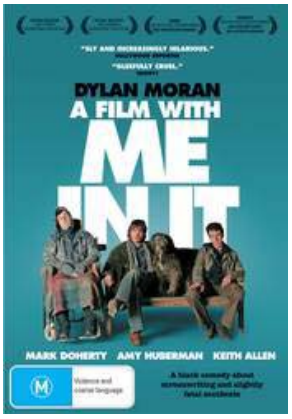
Scott Storm doesn't have much of a film history to his name yet, but if this is the standard of his work he has a great future ahead of him. There are a lot of antisocial moments in the film but he has managed them without going over the top with blood and gore and special effects. This restraint somehow makes the film even more effective regardless of whether it was brought about by a low budget or not.

There are two negatives. In the cover picture Alfonso Freeman looks a lot like Morgan Freeman. I don't know if this was deliberate but it could be misleading.

The other point is that sometimes the dialogue verges on corny. These moments are thankfully brief and don't really detract from what is a great film.

Comedy

A Film With Me In It
Dylan Moran
Beyond Home Entertainment
R4 DVD



Dylan Moran, brooding Irish Comedian and star of *Black Books* stars in the dark and edgy comedy, *A Film With Me in It.* It is a film about two no hopers, failing actor Mark (Mark Doherty) and screenwriter part alcoholic Pierce (Dylan Moran). They both live in a set of broken-down units making the best of their none-too successful lives until a serious of accidents changes everything, for both better and worse.

It is all set up in the early scenes where we note various problems appearing in the unit central to the tale. The chandelier is loose, the bathroom door handle keeps falling off, the window plane slams shut, the plaster is loose and so on. These problems don't seem major until Mark's life begins to fall apart.

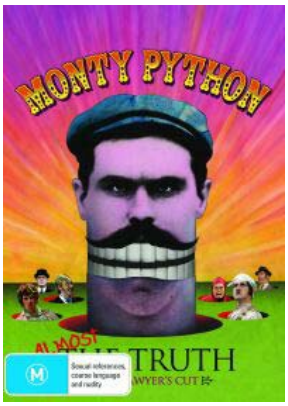
His girlfriend leaves him and as he muses over his future a cupboard falls from the wall and kills her dog, this causes a chain of events which involve a series of fatal accidents. The first is when the chandelier falls killing his disabled brother, a scene which is both tragic and terribly funny. Just as Mark is reeling over his brother's death the landlord arrives to fix the broken light in the kitchen. As he stands on a wobbly stool it crashes to the ground and the screwdriver he is holding is driven through his throat. Accident it may be; but it doesn't look good since Mark owed three months recent and posthumously learns that his girlfriend was having an affair with the landlord.

As his girlfriend comes to pack her gear, she finds Mark's brothers dead body and faints, landing on his clarinet spike resulting in her death as well. The bodies are piling up. As Mark and Pierce try to work out what to do (with a number of harebrained schemes), a police woman arrives. She is actually only there to discuss with Mark a complaint about the noise of his clarinet, but Pierce bangs her on the head with a shovel. She comes too taped to a wheelchair and clearly doesn't believe the story they are telling. However when she cries to escape the window slams shut and kills her !

This is an outrageous black comedy with wickedly funny dialogue, a dry sense of wit and a sense of the ridiculous that Dylan Moran does so well. Yes it is absurd but it works so well. It is even more amusing as they work out a ruse which fools the police and together they make a fortune from a screenplay based on the crime.

This is a dark and witty celebration of the macabre twists of fate which can only occur in the Irish yarn. It is the ultimate tall tale. Marvellous.

Monty Python's Almost The Truth: The Lawyers Cut Shock DVD R4



As you know the Synergy team has always loved Monty Python, they were a focus of our 2009 Comedy issue and hence we were thrilled to hear a truly definitive documentary series was on the way. Monty Python's Almost The Truth is the ultimate guide to Monty Python issued on the 40th anniversary of the TV series Monty Python's Flying Circus. The heart of the 3 DVD or 2 Blu Ray set is six hour long documentaries which cover all aspects of Monty Python including the series, movies, records and shows. The first episode covers the life of each of the members as well as early pre-Python shows such as The Frost Report, At Last the 1948 Show and so on. We also get some real insight into the early lives of each the unique individuals which make up Monty Python and how they met and came to work together.

In the second episode we learn about the first three series of the TV show and how it began in near obscurity and yet developed into a major cult comedy phenomenon. We learn about the development of their unique approach to comedy, their use of surrealism and their battles against censorship as the BBC became more concerned about the content of their programs. We certainly come to appreciate the uniqueness of Monty Python and how they changed the face of comedy forever; in many ways it is reasonable to classify comedy as before and after Python !

The third episode discusses the clashes that occurred amid members of the team at between the third and the fourth season which went ahead without John Cleese. Monty Python had always been a group of extremely odd, eccentric and unusual individuals and this came to a head when John Cleese became convinced that the series was becoming stale, this was of course not helped by Graham Chapman's ongoing problems with alcohol stemming from issues relating to his own sexuality. I especially like the way that the series allows each of the surviving members (and Chapman's partner David Sherlock) to discuss their own views of the clash and offer different perspectives on the problems that occurred. The honesty of the series, especially in this episode, is impressive.

For me what is amazing is not the clash between members (what would one expect between such creative individuals) but the amount they were able to create in such a short time; four seasons, multiple records (and later CDs), movies and more.
Episodes four and five examine the various films which made Monty Python a household name from The Holy Grain to Life of Brian and The Meaning of Life. This is followed by reflections on the Python experience and lots more.

The documentaries are superbly made including interviews with all the surviving members, Graham Chapman via older interviews and his partner, the Python team and a bevy of comedians and fans. There is rare footage, fascinating memories and lots of new content not seen in other documentaries. At the same time we get insight into the history of British comedy from its earliest days with The Goons to later developments. Since members of the team worked with so many major comedians from The Two Ronnies to The Goodies we get to hear from all of them as well.

The third DVD offers a superb collection of extras including extended interviews with a focus on the early years of the Python team and classic sketches such as the Fish Slapping Dance, Lumberjack Song, The Spanish Inquisition, Dead Parrot and many others. From the Cutting Room Floor offers all sorts of content including the Origins of Fawlty Towers to Elvis was a Python Fan, Origins of the Cheese Shop to The Hendon Sketch.

This is certainly the definitive Python documentary series, offering a comprehensive guide to Monty Python (as well as English comedy) with lots of fascinating extras.

Bruno
Universal
R1 DVD

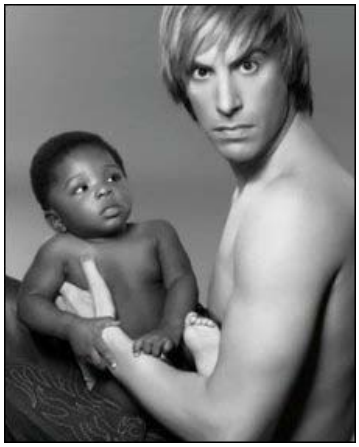
"...the biggest Austrian superstar since Hitler"

Bruno is a shocking, politically incorrect and outrageous assault on the senses. Baron Cohen's first creation, *Ali G* and later *Borat* proved extremely successful and now he has moved into a new territory, that of homophobia. While many Gay and Lesbian people have decried that Bruno is "stereotyped" I think this shows a total lack of understanding of how Cohen works. Cohen creates a persona which is deliberately exaggerated, extreme and over the top so as to draw out people's innate prejudices.

At the same time he does not just target homophobia, he equally makes fun of the vacuity of much of the gay community and the cult of the fashionista. There are scenes which are so nerve wracking that it is difficult to watch the screen, I still cannot believe he set up a boxing match and then made out with an opponent in cage surrounded by shocked and violent rednecks.

Bruno is a gay Austrian TV fashion journalist who is flamboyant, blond, frivolous, promiscuous and 19 years old. He is fired from his TV programme Funkyzeit after an incident at the Milan Fashion awards. He arrived in a suitably outrageous full body velcro outfit which stuck to a curtain and threw him crashing onto the catwalk. He is soon unable to get into any of the trendy clubs and is persona non grata in the fashion community. Crestfallen, Bruno denounces the fashion world as shallow and decides to enter into a new career; one he thinks has great depth, becoming a celebrity!

He arrives in L.A and tries to enter into acting and fails miserably, his attempt at a talkback program also has little success after a number of problem-some (but very funny) interviews. Even when he dances and has his urethra sing the word "Bruno" it is not enough to get his show off the ground. He is depressed since he even got his anus bleached for the program!



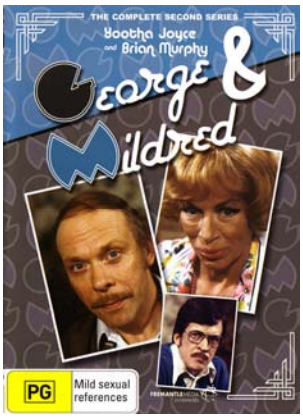
After a journey to the Middle East where he tries to achieve world peace through a range of bizarre episodes including as dressing as a gay Orthodox Jew and trying to mediate between Palestinians and Israelis including a funny incident where he confuses Hummus with Hamas. He returns to L.A. via Africa having adopting an African baby.

The adoption leads to a truly raucous episode on an African American TV Show and a long exploration of the ex-gay movement. The ex-gay sections are some of the better of the show. He shows how truly foolish the movement is with extended interviews with one of their representatives and some truly hysterical attempts to act straight including going shooting, attending a swingers party and lots more. His time at a Karate school where the instructor teaches him how to protect himself against gay men (they are like terrorists, you cannot tell them from normal people) is both amusing and revealing. Special Karate skills against a man armed with two dildos seems very useful.

There are so many truly awkward, funny and offensive scenes in this film it is hard to list them all. The climactic scene where he decides to prove how straight he is in a caged boxing match is a show stopper. He confronts his ex-assistant, fall in loves and rediscovers his sexuality in front of thousands of screaming inbreds and yokels.

The ending is a little condescending with A list celebrities joining him in a song for peace, but what the hell; it is one heck of a ride and lots of fun.

George and Mildred
Season 2
Thames TV
Fremantle Media Enterprises
R4 DVD



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

The *George & Mildred* series was a spinoff from the earlier very popular *Man About The House* series. We met George and Mildred Roper (Brian Murphy and Yootha Joyce) as the landlords, but they were rather minor characters. They showed promise so when *Man About The House* finished Thames TV gave them their own show, once again written by the brilliant team of Johnnie Mortimer and Brian Cooke. The writers enlarged the characters a bit but stuck faithfully to the personalities they had worked out in the earlier show.

George and Mildred have left central London and moved into suburbia. George is still a firmly lower- class, grotty little man in spite of his wife's efforts to reform him. He resents snobs and social climbers. Mildred has middle-class aspirations but is constantly let down by George. Otherwise she is the same hard, sex-starved but basically good-hearted woman from *Man About The House*.

Their new neighbours are Geoffrey Fourmile

What is it about English people and drag ? And bad drag at that !

(Norman Eshley), a pompous middle-class type, and his wife Anne (Sheila Fearn) who occasionally has to bring him gently down to earth when he gets on a rant about the Ropers. Anne has no great pretensions and is a good friend of Mildred's. The Fourmiles also have an eight year-old son, Tristan (Nicholas Bond-Owen) , whose enquiring mind and awkwardly-timed questions are the bane of his father's life.

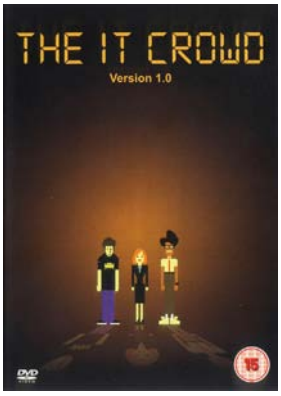
There is enough conflict between these characters and their class differences to provide a wealth of material for the show. Like their other shows Mortimer and Cooke were always funny, rarely verging into anything slightly smutty (apart from George's collection of "gardening" magazines).

The closest they got to being offensive was the Christmas show with George in drag. This scene is not pretty, and young impressionable children should be sent to bed.

The dialogue was getting closer to the American one-liner style, but always at a gentle pace so you could enjoy the characters as much as the repartee. Even George's occasional outbursts about snobs are mild compared with the sheer abrasive bigotry shown in other British sitcoms like *Til Death Do Us Part*. The success of the show was due as much to the quality of the acting as to the scripts. All the actors filled out their parts skilfully to proper three dimensional characters.

George and Mildred were resurrected in a 1980 film, which shows the popularity of the show through the 1970s. I always though t it was one of the better British sitcoms and this DVD release only confirms it.

The I.T Crowd
Seasons 1-3
2006 - 2009
Hopscotch and
Roadshow
R4 DVD



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

From the British Thames TV we have this lively little comedy about the goings-on in the computer Help Desk department of a large firm. Unlike the darker new wave of comedy we have been reviewing lately from Britain, this show is standard comedy, funny verging of farcical. Written by Graham Linehan and Ben Fuller, it owes more to the classic demented Monty Python style than to black comedy. The couple also wrote Black Books and Dead Ringers, so if you are familiar with these you immediately recognize the style.

Moss (Richard Ayoade) is the technical genius / geek with a phobia for spiders and the social skills of a housebrick. He is also accident prone and seems to be on another planet most of the time. Even when he sets the department on fire he can only contact the Fire Brigade via email. Naturally he lives at home with his mother.

Roy (Chris O"Dowd) is a lazy Irish slob, irreverent and untidy, who goes to remarkable lengths to avoid work. His character seems to be a continuation of the infamous Bernard Black of Black Books. Roy not only has no social skills, he is rude as well. He even has his standard responses to IT problems on a tape recorder to avoid having to speak to real people. ("Have you tried turning it off and turning it on again?" or "Is it definitely plugged in?") Sadly, these responses do indeed fix most of the IT problems. This doesn't say much for the rest of the office staff.

The IT section is located in a basement room filled with junk, broken computers and Roy's leftover meals. It is managed by Jen (Katherine Parkinson) who got the job on the strength of a good (but totally false) resume despite having no IT skills at all. She sees herself as a People Person, something the IT section desperately needs, so she has reclassified herself to Relationship Manager between IT and the rest of the company. Roy and Moss are aware she has no IT skills but cover for her because the company owner Denholm Raynholm (Chris Morris) will sack anyone who is not a "team player" – they must become a team or else. Jen is dreadfully insecure at work but give her a shop full of shoes and she can be as ruthless as needed.

It is inevitable that their personal lives and their work lives will mingle and this is where some of the funniest situations appear. Nothing is private within the office building. The show is full of in IT jokes and personality stereotypes and it manages to be funny without being smutty. These days that is quite an achievement.

In the three-season life of the show many well-known actors have come and gone, such as Matt Berry (from the dark comedy Snuffbox). A fourth series is currently proposed, showing how popular this style of humour still is. The three present series have been shown in many countries so there are still plenty of fans of this earlier style of humour worldwide.

Last of the Summer Wine
Series 5 and 6
1996, reissued 2009
Comedy, Britain
ABC DVD
R4

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

This gentle little British comedy turned out to be the BBC's longest-running comedy series. It premiered in 1973 and the thirtieth series concluded in 2009. It's a testament to Roy Clarke's fine scripts and the brilliant character acting of the lead players. This 3-DVD compilation includes all of series 5 and 6 as well as the Christmas specials of 1978, 1979 and 1981. At this period the actors had settled into their character roles and the show was at the start of its very long peak.

The story revolves around three ageing men living in a quiet little Yorkshire village. We have the tight-fisted Foggy (Brian Wilde), the ex-Army type (actually a Corporal of Signwriting) who is full of ideas about how he can brighten up their retirement. The ideas usually involve someone else doing the work. The bane of his life is Compo (Bill Owen), an unrepentantly scruffy little man of undesirable habits, a host of mysterious girlfriends throughout his life "*My life has not been wasted*" , and a reputation for eating anything. His aim in his remaining years is to satisfy his carnal lust for Nora Batty, a local housewife. He deflates Foggy's wilder ideas mercilessly and is assisted in this by widower Clegg (Peter Sallis – the voice will be familiar if you watched any of the Wallace and Gromit animation shows). Clegg is the only one to have been married, and he is the thinker of the group. He mentions in the first show that he is coming to doubt his sexuality because he enjoys ironing.

The characters and actors changed through the show's long history but these series are in many ways some of the best. The later actors had a big job to live up to the standard of these men. Many were extremely competent actors themselves but somehow Owen, Sallis and Wilde made the parts their own and were a hard act to follow. One nice point about the show was that other people in the village received the same attention to their characters and appeared often enough that the audience became familiar with them as well. This was a good move as occasionally it was necessary to write a character out of the story. They could be replaced with another character with whom the audience was already familiar, which kept the continuity going. It must be remembered that the actors themselves were not young and probably never anticipated the show going as long as it did.

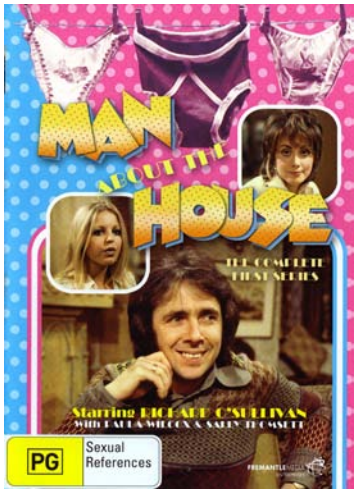
Last of the Summer Wine is essentially a show about boys being boys even in the sunset of their lives, but the authority figures in the shows are without a doubt the women. There is the previously mentioned Nora Batty, the object of Compo's lust. If he was to succeed in conquering Nora would he survive the experience? Ivy, the tea shop owner's wife, is almost as much of a battleaxe as Nora and wields a mean wooden spoon.

The plots themselves were simple and funny. How do you steal a train?

Why are married men furtively heading off into the woods with bedrolls? How are you going to get a very tall flagpole up a very steep hill? Why would elderly men take up hang gliding? Slapstick abounds.

The show pokes fun at the idea of growing old gracefully. There is something grim about the idea of just waiting around to die, but that doesn't happen here. It is just a happy romp over the traditional approach to old age, and a great laugh.

Man about the House Series One
DVD Reissue 2009
British Comedy
Fremantle Media
R4 DVD



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

I had forgotten just how good this sitcom was until this rerelease. The show dates back to 1973 when the subject, a young man sharing a flat with two girls, was regarded as rather naughty.

In spite of this it turned out to be a winner for Thames TV and even turned up in the U.S. as a rather ordinary remake *Three's Company*. In the three years that it ran, it spun off two further TV shows (*George and Mildred* and *Robin's Nest*) and a feature film.

Robin Tripp was a young man who came to London to learn to be a chef, which was an asset as the girls couldn't cook. Their landlord was George Roper, ageing, grumpy, and constantly trying to avoid the advances of his sex-starved and childless wife Mildred. These characters bounced off each other right through the series.

The show's success was due to two factors. First, Johnnie Mortimer and Brian Cooke's scripts were really well written. The characters were diverse and so offered a range of attitudes to explore. The girls were happy, modern girls of their time, but not sexually promiscuous in spite of this period being known as the Swinging Seventies. A certain sexual tension was there but never overpowered the comedy.

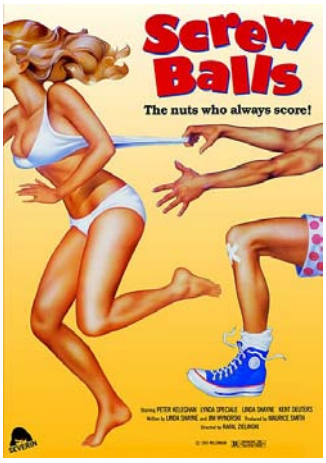
The second factor was the good acting. The characters dropped straight into their parts right from the first episode.- likeable girl-next-door Chrissy (Paula Wilcox), dumb but lovable blonde Jo (Sally Thomsett), the somewhat unsure-of-himself Robin (Richard O'Sullivan), and the Ropers (Brian Murphy and Yootha Joyce).

None of them were objectionable in any way and the shows just let the plot develop the humour. Other minor characters moved in and out of the episodes throughout the

series but generally the major characters carried the show. Many episodes were based around the problems of mixed sexes sharing a flat in accommodation-starved London.

This DVD covers the eight episodes of Series One. For its age it was a well-produced show with the glorious colours and styles of the period showing up well. The transfer to DVD is superb. If you want to revisit those older, happier times, here is nearly three hours of one of the best British comedies.

Screwballs
R1 DVD
Severin Films



Any randy boy growing up in the 1980s (in that long dark period when there was no internet porn), who wanted to see semi-naked women and maybe even boobies turned to teen sex films. There were lots of them and Porky's helped bring them into the mainstream. Roger Corman, the master of exploitation and B Grade, not to be outdone, decided to make his own take on the genre and as expected he took it to the ninth degree and presented the world with a work of truly trashy exploitation cinema, *Screwballs*.

Corman is a perceptive filmmaker and under the guise of a B grade film shyster is an astute marketeer, he knows what the market wants. So in the Eighties while other films padded their tales of teen sex with nerd storylines or sporting plots, Corman gave the audience what they craved; flesh, sex and dirty humour.

At T & A High School, there is big hair, Eighties music and lots of bad boys. Five of the worst meet in the detention room thanks to the evil virgin princess Purity Busch, one of the only girls in the school who still has her cherry intact. They are all typical stereotypes; the jock, nerd, fat dude and a couple of snobby rich guys and are all in detention for the worst possible reasons. Rick dressed as a doctor and examined the beasts of new girls at the school and Brent sexually teased Purity in French class. Poor old Melvin Jerkoffski was caught wanking in the meat locker and Howie rearranged the mirrors so he could see up the skirts of the schools cheerleaders. Finally there is Tim tricked into entering the girls washroom. Each one has been fooled by Purity and each wants revenge and together they decide it is time somebody gets to third base with her. Sure the plot is simple, filled with stereotypical characters and ridiculous set-pieces, but it is so absurd, so utterly ludicrous it is actually damn funny.

In many ways it is a teen fantasy film, none of these events would ever happen in real life and if they did, in our modern "politically correct" society, would land you in lots of serious trouble. I think this is what makes *Screwballs* even more outrageous today than went it was first made. We have become so uptight, so "PC" so careful with what we say that its low grade humour actually becomes more amusing not less. *Screwballs* is, honest, rude, crude, down and dirty good fun with lots of dick and fart jokes, a silly plot and an unapologetically B grade feel.

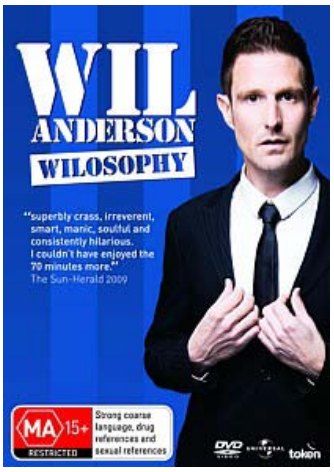
Don't expect deep themes or moving dialogue, insightful commentary or perceptive cinematography, just accept it for what it is and have a damn good laugh. Marvellous.

The reproduction of this film is impressive and it is amusing to think how much loving care Severin has taken with this film which was really a minor Canadian Porky's rip-off and yet has managed to somehow claim cult status over time. It is a great DVD transfer with excellent sound and picture quality.

The extras are good too with a commentary and interview with director, Rafal Zielinski. An 18 minute interview with the writers Linda Shayne and Jim Wynorski and other cast and crew interviews.

There is also an interview with Canuxsploitation scholar Paul Corupe, but the best is with Mr. Skin and McBeardo who discuss the impact of the teen sex genre. There are also some deleted scenes.

Wil Anderson: Wilosophy
Universal Pictures
R4 DVD



Wil Anderson, co-median extraordinaire, host of ABC TV's *The Gruen Transfer* and author of *Friendly Fire* (Random House 2009) is back to what he does best, live comedy.

His latest comedy show *Wilosophy* has been performed around the globe with sold out performances.

The double DVD edition includes the show plus bonus content including exclusive footage from Wil's club spot at the Sydney Comedy Store including such support acts as Dave Williams and Sam Bowring, it also includes the Justin Hamilton set from the Sydney Opera House and Wil Anderson talking to Rove.

Wilosophy represents an older and a little more cynical Wil Anderson, it is surprisingly honest and reflective and includes all sorts of musing's about modern life, growing older and Australian society, all presented with Anderson's uniquely Aussie sense of humour. Crude, blunt, certainly colourful, Anderson discusses everything from religion to politics, sex to owning a house, reaching mid Thirties to relationships.

While he seems at ease and the joke fly fast off his tongue, clearly this is a carefully crafted performance. His set on religion, intelligent design and Islam is perfectly structured to push limits but not go too far, to make people think while amusing them but not to be offensive. He may be politically incorrect in his presentation but he has a clear understanding of how far he feels his comedy should go and his show is better for it. This may be stand-up comedy but it is nicely refined and well polished with spontaneous interplay with the audience mixed with well rehearsed routines and material.

His personal life is much more on display in this performance which is endearing and, of course, great grist for the comedy mill, his self deprecating style of humour works well as he laughs as his own short comings and reflects on the nature of relationships and his own experiences.

This is Wil Anderson at his best, ribald, funny, honest and thought provoking. There is not a single dull moment and the rollercoaster ride through current events, personal issues and thoughts on what makes the world go round makes this a very successful show. The DVD is a great way to enjoy this performance, also remember he is performed live around Australia during October and November.

Cult Cinema

Attraction
(Nerosubianco)
Tinto Brass
Cult Epics
R0 DVD

Cult Epics never ceases to amaze and astound, from their earliest releases they have made available strange and wonderful films not seen anywhere else. *Attraction* is certainly a rare discovery. *Attraction* (*Nerosubianco*) by Tinto Brass was a surreal pop art film made in the late Sixties reflecting on the nature of sexual suppression. It was released in the United States through Radley Metzger's Audubon films as The Artful Penetration of Barbara and Cult Epics have got hold of a very impressive 16mm print.

Attraction is a surreal journey through what is really one long music video clip. It has no real linear plot but simply presents on scene the experience of Barbara (Anita Sanders), a married woman who, unsatisfied with her husband, resists then finally revels in love with an African-American man. Barbara believes her husband Paulo no longer finds her attractive and hence has lost confidence in her own emotions and sexuality.

The film explores her experiences through artistic imagery, symbolism, iconography and the externalization of her internal dialogue. It playfully uses all manner of imagery from advertising to logos, film clips to news footage. Major themes such as "sexual suppression (prohibito)

causing violence" are expressed through montages of footage, clips, news articles and animation. At times there is a riot of images driven by the truly psychedelic soundtrack by Ray Royer and Bobby Harrison of Freedom, which were the remnants of the group Procal Harum.

Brass carefully manipulates the pace of the film so we do not get too comfortable; at times funny, at time erotic, it also becomes confronting and taboo breaking. Just some of the more lasting images include old women in a hairdressers becoming cows, a woman belting her husband with a baby who then throws it out a window, a girl with a flower shoots her brains out and a model with a stylized machine gun mows men down !

There are also strange memorable but indecipherable one-lines such as "the medium is the massage" and a fun use of advertising slogans, logos, posters and marketing ploys in a way which subverts their intended message and uses it to reinforce Brass' key theme of the danger of sexual suppression and related themes regarding the Vietnam War, Race Relations, misuse of authority and so on.

Attraction is presented in an anamorphic widescreen transfer which offers a 1.85:1 aspect ratio. While there is some minor damage visible at the credits (start and end), the rest is surprisingly clear with very minor problems here and there. Considering the rarity of this film the colours are excellent and the soundtrack is clear. A nice menu option is the ability to choose segments of the movie by song.

Black Devil Doll
Lowest Common Denominator
R0 DVD

I have always loved puppets in movies, from the benign to the bizarre, from *Devil Doll* (1964) to *The Black Devil Doll from Hell* (1984) from Chucky in *Child's Play* (1988) and sequels, from *Let My Puppet's come* (1976) to *Meet the Feebles* (1988). I also adore exploitation cinema, when I heard about *Black Devil Doll* I thought all my Christmases has come at once, a truly outrageous exploitation film about an evil "Black Devil Doll" with sex and gore, what more could I want ? Jonathan Lewis, a man truly after my own heart, has an unhealthy obsession with puppet films and loves to shock, offend and entertain. He has created a true masterpiece of raunchy and dirty sleaze which will have you screaming with laughter while trying not to admit to others how much you enjoyed this awesomely un-pc cult classic. He achieve this all to a truly groovy soundtrack by The Gaillos Flame.

A black militant is led to the electric chair for raping and killing 15 white chicks. At the same time young and bountiful heather is bored out of her mind and starts playing with a Ouija board. Soon the spirit of the militant is summoned back from hell and transforms the body of a white toy doll into a black, afro haired jive talking doll. Three feet in height but certainly having the right bits in the right places he seduces young Heather and uses her to continue his revenge against white woman.

He convinces the love struck Heather to invite some of her white girlfriends around for "girls time". After spending an inordinate period doing a hot girl-on-girl sex dance while washing the car (all to a hip hop beat), they have some drinks at Heathers. When she makes her exit (as prearranged with her puppet lover) he sets to work banging the young things and disposing of them in the most violent way possible. Along the way Heathers ex (White T) arrives and is knocked out and anally raped to prove the puppet is really the man !

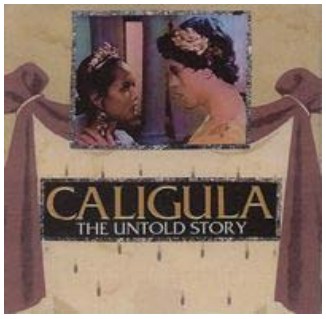
Filled with an abundance of flesh, and I mean "abundance", these are large girls with lots on display and nearly constant sex scenes. This is matched only by the truly outrageous dialogue and lots of blood, gore and guts. This is a film filled with puppet sex, necrophilia, gore, violence, constant use of the nigga word and lots more. For years exploitation cinema has explored "Vets" returning from war and taking revenge on the unsuspecting public, this time it is the turn of the black militant !

Black Devil Doll is absolutely stuffed with extras including a commentary by the filmmakers and Black Devil himself, trailers, galleries and some festival footage showing Jonathan Lewis throwing out black dildos to the crowd at the world premiere. The animations found at the beginning of the film with the anti piracy warning and the rating are a real joy !

There is so much to like in this film; from it raucous politically incorrect dialogue to its outrageous plot, from its animations to its superior score, from the constant tits and arse to the buckets of blood. This is exploitation cinema refined to the level of art ! Every last detail has been carefully presented including the marvellous poster, great packaging, and more, all that is missing is the doll, I want one now !!

Web: http://wwwBlackDevilDoll.Com

Caligula 2:
The Untold Story
Uncut 126 minute
Print (E)
Cinema de Bizarre



Caligula 2 is an amazing sleazefest from Joe D'Amato starting David Brandon as Caligula and the beautiful Laura Gemser. The film has been released in Germany and Italy uncut, but not in the UK, Australia or the US. A DVD-R edition is available from Cinema de Bizarre. This is certainly a superb, sleazy and outrageous work of cinema, offering two hours of truly astounding sex, violence and perversity; it is a cult film par excellence.

Joe D'Amato, master of low budget exploitation, takes on the mantle of Caligula after the fame of the Tinto Brass/Penthouse release and makes a film which is clearly not a sequel but a film which takes inspiration from the legend to create a true exploration of depravity.

D'Amato himself sets the stage through the prologue.." *Caligula (Gaius Ceasar) murdered his adopted grandfather Tiberius to assume power. He committed Incest with his sisters, adultery with his friends wives, pederasty, flaunted the law and was a glutton, pervert and epileptic".* Quite a lot to live up to but D'Amato rises to the occasion and does fairly well !

The film opens with an assassination attempt, which is rather fun since the assassin is no other than Michele Soavi (another cult film maker) playing Domitius. Caligula catches him just in time and rather than killing him off, has his tendons cut and his tongue excised so he can keep in as a plaything.

As the film develops we find Caligula at his very best attempting to have his way with a virtuous young Christian girl who kills himself rather than submitting to his wicked desires. This triggers a story of love, lust and revenge. Her friend and lover, the Moorish Priestess Miriam (played by Laura Gemser), deflowers herself in front of a statue of Anubis and sets herself on the task of getting very close to Caligula so she may take revenge for her friend's death.

However, before this startling, but totally fictional, plot unfolds Caligula must find funds to support the re-development of his palace and so stages a grand orgy. To get enough young girls, he has the Vestal Virgins trained for the role. They are inspected, deflowered in an underwater scene and then taught the skills of sex on a hunky Greek boy by an aging Roman transvestite.

At the same time, of course, we are entertained by Caligula's bi-sexual tastes with sex and nudity galore. While most of these scenes are soft erotica, they occasionally blur into explicit sex, until the orgy scene itself hits and wallop; there is an outburst of 30 minutes of explicit sex you will not easier forget.

The orgy scene is startling and filled with all manner of sexual content. We have explicit sex of all forms including dwarves and horse fondling. There is even an armed gladiatorial match with blood splattered over the copulating revellers and a senator continuously vomiting during sex-play. This is certainly an extreme and excessive presentation, so utterly over the top it is riveting exploitation cinema.

Caligula's madness deteriorates when Miriam stops an assassination attempt on his life (as she wants to take her own revenge) and Caligula must punish the plotters.

This involves an explosion of violence which includes smashing a baby against a brick wall, long metal rods rammed up behinds and Senators forced to kill women and children to save their own skin. Miriam drugs Caligula's wine and as his hallucinations increase his dreams of murdered foes begin to haunt every moment of his day.

D'Amato has certainly pulled out all the stops in this one with more sex, gore, violence and perversity than in most libraries of cult films. This is certainly a film which is not for the timid, but if you are sick enough to dare, it is worth well worth the effort to get a copy.

The cinematography is pretty damn good for a low budget film, the soundtrack suitably Imperial and the constant nudity isn't too hard on the eyes either. Recommended !

Cinema de Bizarre
Web: http://cinema-de-bizarre.com

Inglourious Basterds
Quentin Tarantino
Cinema Release

Inglourious Basterds is an amazing homage to exploitation and cult cinema, it is a film which will divide audiences, you will either "get it" or you won't, no matter how hard you try. Tarantino has taken inspiration from the quirky war film by Enzo Castellari's *The Inglorious Bastards* (1978) and other over the top Italian war classics. These films celebrated in the larger than life, the Nazis were super evil and the Allies bad, dirty and nasty, but on the side of good. They used stereotypes in a darkly humorous manner and were not above a bit of exploitation cinema along the way. In many ways they were Westerns in the form of war films. Tarantino has taken these as well as exploitation and cult cinema and moulded it all into a truly marathon cult extravaganza. It is irreverent, funny, dark, amusing and certainly memorable.

It is 1941 and we are in German-occupied France. Colonel Hans Landa of the SS is in charge of searching out a missing Jewish dairy family. He is fastidious about his work in a sort of Hannibal Lecter sort of way. He is well dressed, stylish, witty even urbane but at the same time brutal and vicious. He is nicknamed the Jew Hunter; he slaughters a Jewish family hiding under the floorboards of a farmhouse but the teenage daughter Shosanna escapes.

1st Lieutenant Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt) is a hard man; he has no time for Nazis and expects his soldiers to kill them on sight collecting their scalps for him. He has brought together a team of eight American Jewish soldiers to secretly parachute into occupied France. (They are joined later by an insubordinate German killer to make nine.) Their aim is to strike terror into the heart of the German military by slaughtering as many soldiers as possible, leaving an occasional individual alive (with a Swastika carved on their forehead) to tell others of their ordeal.

The team is so successful that the legend of one of their number, the Jew Bear spreads and many Germans come to believe he is sort of supernatural golem which can come and go at will. We experience the ferocity of the Basterds in gruesome detail and also come to see Hitler at his most manic and hysterical best.

Shosanna has survived emotionally scarred and is seeking revenge, she lives under an assumed identity in Paris running a cinema with her lover, a black Frenchman named Marcel. She meets Frederick Zoller who is also a film lover, at the same time he is not only a German marksman but a war hero whom Goebbels has immortalized in film. Zoller tries to woo her to

no avail but won't take no for an answer. Soon Zoller has convinced Goebbels to hold the premier of the film at Shosanna's theater. She at last has chance at revenge and begins to hatch a plan.

At the same time The British have also learned of the premiere and want in on the action, they do not know about Shosanna's plan, so they hatch one of their own involving an English agent and the Basterds. They send arrogant film critic Lieutenant Archie Hicox to Paris to lead the mission.
They meet with double agent Bridget von Hammersmark who will arrange to get them into the event as film buffs. However things soon come unstuck. The English agent, arrogant and cocky, overplays his cards and a Gestapo agent picks he is not German. An outrageous bar scene entails where everyone is shot and Hammersmark shot in the leg. Landa arrives to examine the scene and finds an autograph and shoe belonging to Hammersmark and is onto their game. Their cover is blown but they do not know it.

The new plan is that Raine, Donny and Omar will pose as Hammersmark's escorts at the premiere. They will pretend to be Italian so their exaggerated accents will not be as obvious. As the premiere unfolds, Shosanna and Marcel are preparing to set the premises on fire having stacked high flammable film stock behind the screen.

Landa interrogates Hammersmark, losing his cool; he brutally strangles her with his bare hands, the psychopath behind the man is revealed. He has Raine and Utivich arrested but strangely leaves the other two in place. It seems Landa is a true nutter, he is not ideologically devoted to any cause, including the Reich but is only obsessed with himself. In a truly bizarre scene he negotiates with Raine's boss to gain immunity and lots of "goodies" in exchange for allowing the war to end and his bosses to be slaughtered !

As he is sacrificing all around him for petty gain, Zoller goes to the projectionist booth to see Shosanna. This time her rejection is too much for him and he becomes a problem, she shoots him but not before he can kill her as well in true Shakespearean style. Marcel bolts the doors to the cinema shut and enters behind the screen, as the film reaches its climax it is interrupted by a new segment added in by Shosanna. She informs them they are all about to be killed by a Jew. The cinema catches fire, the bombs go off and the two remaining Basterds blast the rest of the Nazis to hell with guns !

Landa thinks he has it made, but Raine advises that while he is obligated to deliver him to American freedom, he feels Landa should carry a reminder of his past and carves a very deep swastika into Landa's forehead.

This is truly stunning cult cinema, combining the feel of a Western, a war film and exploitation cinema. It is loaded with classic dialogue, wit, humour and a very dark sense of play. All of the characters are superbly played, from Christoph Waltz as the Nazi you most love to hate to Brad Pitt as the head Basterd.

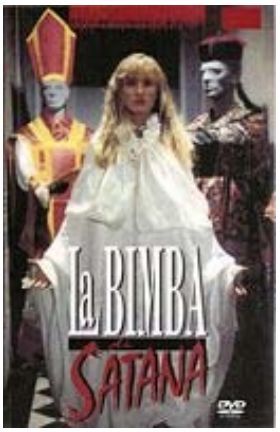
Tarantino has a knack of playing with cinema in a way you least expect. He encodes all sorts of strange cinema references into the symbolism of the film. For example, when Shosanna prepares for her final mission, she dresses up in a red dress with a black veil and becomes a femme fatale. As she does so the music in the background is the *Cat People* theme by David Bowie. If you have seen *Cat People* there is an obvious association being made between her transformation from cinema owner to assassin with the transformation from human to cat woman in the earlier film. Another motif is found in the end, as the Nazis are killed the image of Shosanna comes out of the screen projected through the smoke repeating the line "you are being killed by a Jew". There is a strong resonance of this image with the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, where the Shekinah, the feminine side of God came out of the Ark of the Covenant and killed the Nazis. Here is a secular version where a Jewish female comes out of the screen and does the job. Tarantino seems to love to play with these images and create all sorts of unusual motifs which add a real depth to the film, if you see them.

Tarantino's depiction of various nationalities is also intriguing. Traditionally war films and westerns tend to draw simple distinctions between the Nazis and the English or Cowboys and Indians, here there is a strange sense of play. The Germans are actually underemphasized in the film on the whole, Tarantino focuses in on specific Nazi characters such as Hitler, Goebbels, Landa and Zoller, this is significant as it moves away from the, at times, distasteful stereotyping of all Germans as Nazis. The English are portrayed as somewhat arrogant and out of touch. Mike Myers as General Ed Fenech is excellent but Michael Fassbender as Lt. Archie Hicox superbly portrays the over confident arrogance marked by the English upper class which, in this case, costs a lot of lives.

The portrayal of Jews in Inglorious Basterds is unusual. The traditional portrayal usually focuses on the pain and suffering of the Jewish people (and righty so) but there Tarantino does something quite unique. In a way he creates a fantasy for the minorities killed by the Nazis, in this story it is a Jewish woman and a black Frenchmen who are able to bring down the heads of the Nazi empire and win the war with the help of eight Jewish American Basterds and one mad German traitor! The Basterds are all astounding tough and in your face Jewish people with a "we are not goin' to take no shit" attitude while Shosanna as the Jewish heroine is truly sublime. The climax of the film as her image floats in the smoke as the Nazis are killed is such a powerful moment. Tarantino is so clearly creating a new myth for us where the minorities win, where a Jewish woman and a black Frenchman can bring down a conservative fascist empire, I just love it! It is a strange feeling watching this scene; sure it is a pulp, cult film filled with over the top performances and a surreal sense of fantasy, yet just for a moment experiencing the thought that the Nazis could be destroyed by this interracial couple brings a chill of excitement and a thrill of exhilaration.

There are so many nuances and textures to this film, I found it visually appealing, filled with complex symbols and motifs, loaded with great dialogue, superb performances and a true B movie cult film plot. At the same time it was a load of fun !

Satan's Baby Doll
Cinema De Bizarre
DVD-R
(E)



Satan's Baby Doll (1982) aka *La Bimba di Satana* and *Orgasmo di Satana* is a notorious Eurosleaze film focused on sex, possession and family dysfunction. The most common version of this film is the softcore release, Cinema De Bizarre have the rare uncut 85 minute edition which includes wallops of wild sex of various forms. In some cases more explicit content takes away from a cult film, but in *Satan's Baby Doll* it really adds to the atmosphere. This is a film centred on sex and sleaze and how a wild, highly sexed woman, when murdered by her husband possesses her daughter and uses her to wreak revenge and so all the hardcore action really fits the context of the film. It is beautifully filmed filled with haunting goth imagery as well as featuring some awesome music mixing electronica with choral singing with an "Exorcist" feel.

Essentially a horny remake of *Malabimba, the Malicious Whore*, *Satan's Baby Doll* takes the sleaze to a whole new level including nearly relentless nudity and sex, strange rites, lesbian nuns, a weird chicken strangling and drug induced madness. Mario Bianchi planned the film with explicit content from the beginning and so the uncut release has a certainly continuity which is certainly lacking in the tamer softcore release.

A wealthy family which lives isolated in a decaying castle is mourning the death of Maria, the wife of rich and arrogant landowner Antonio

Aguilar. While it is presumed she has died of a heart attack, it later becomes clear that she was murdered by Antonio due to his intense jealousy, triggered in no mean part by her persistent affairs. Antonio lives with his daughter Miria, his paraplegic brother Ignazio, Ignazio's carer novice nun Sol and the superstitious servant, Isidro.

Miria, their young daughter is attending the funeral and as she lays flowers on her mother's beast, the body spasms and seems to gaze into the young girls eyes. Miria is traumatized and this is not helped by the ongoing tensions in the household. Antonio is vicious and self centred, Ignazio is isolated having no use of his body from the neck down and Sol clearly has some problems balancing her lesbian feelings with her vocation.

It seems that the strength at the heart of the family was Maria and since she is gone the family begins to fight and bicker and Antonio's drug use increases. Soon Miria hears her mother's voice and goes to the basement to answer her call. When the corpse seems to open its eyes, she faints then becomes hysterical. When the doctor (who also had an affair with Maria) tries to send Miria away from the castle; the killing begins. Maria re-animates (or uses Miria, it is not quite clear) and injects him with embalming fluid in a scene which literally couples sex and death.

Miria is now under the total control of her mother who begins to take revenge on all and sundry. The visual interplay between the older experienced Maria and the young Miria is well done and effective; we are never quite sure who is actually doing the killing. Isidro attempts some strange rite involving a desiccated corpse to expel the spirit from Miria but it does no good and he goes down next. As the body count

mounts Antonio seems more interested in seducing Sol than anything else, but this fails as her desires lay elsewhere.

Antonio has now had enough of Sol's rejections and decides to do away with her reason to be in the castle - his brother (who it seems also had an affair with his wife – she seems to have been a very busy woman!). He takes him to the basement where he aims to leave him to starve to death. However it seems Maria has a different fate in store for Ignazio, she possesses Miria who awakens the dead (literally) with some accomplished mouth-work and then encourages him to walk, letting him fall through the floor.

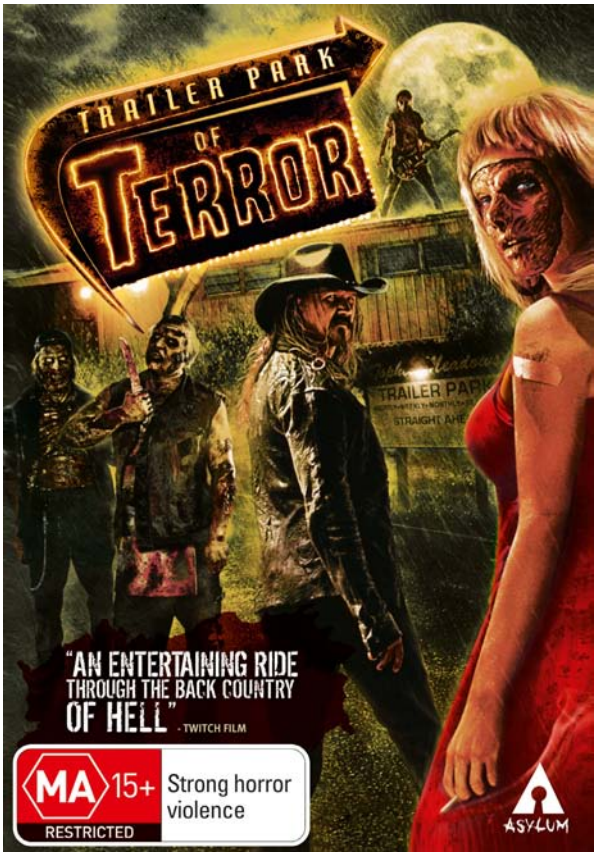
Of course next Antonio must be taught a lesson and Maria/Miria "mother in daughter's body" offer a very passionate but fateful revenge. He experiences her body for the last time but soon realizes it is through his daughter's flesh ! This is a wild ride of the film filled with so much that is sleazy, nasty, edgy and sexy. It is truly delight !

Throughout the film are prolonged sex scenes which are both explicit but at the same time challenging since they work within the context of a gothic horror type tale.

While there is a masterfully restored edition of the film on the market it is heavily edited. This uncut edition offers all the sleaze one could hope for and is a true eurotrash experience.

This is a film designed to be watched with all the sex intact and so I recommend you visit the Cinema de Bizarre website and get yourself a copy. Have a good look through their range while you are there, you are likely to find other rare and obscure gems to titillate and amuse.

Web: http://cinema-de-bizarre.com



Trailer Park of Terror
Madman
R4 DVD

Trailer Park of Terror is one of those movie gems you do not come across often; mixing together cult, exploitation and horror genres it is outrageous gore ridden fun. Matched with a hard rock hillbilly soundtrack and a great sense of humour this is truly a marvellous adaptation of the Imperium comic book series.

The film opens like a classic work of exploitation cinema, Norma lives in a broken down trailer park filled with rednecks, inbreds and hillbillies, but wants a better life. Her boyfriend has promised to help her escape from the life of squalor, abuse and violence but when he arrives to take her on a date things go horribly wrong.

Taunting and abuse lead to a confrontation and finally to his murder; he is skewered by two metal fence posts as he looses his footing during the brawl.

Norma is both bereft with grief and furious, as she wanders confused and bewildered aimlessly along the dusty track leading away from the park she meets a strange heavy metal character who blocks her way.

This strange man reaches into the back of his van which is filled with snakes and one turns into a gleaming gun which seems to contain limitless ammunition. He offers her the opportunity for revenge but she does not appreciate the cost, you see he is the devil and she has sold her soul and the souls of all those she kills.

She slaughters everyone in the trailer park with quite some panache, turns on the gas and nonchalantly relaxes with a cigarette waiting for the park to explode as it duly does.

For years stories abound about people going missing when they travel past the park, tourists, children even locals aren't spared.

It is twenty years later and a group of dysfunctional teens associated with their youthful pastor are on the way to the mountains for a retreat. They are a motley bunch and clearly don't take the religious ravings of their youth leader especially seriously. As they head into a rainy night the preacher takes a wrong turn and distracted by one of the group writes off the van. They see a sign for a local trailer park and with no mobile phone reception decide to ask for help.

They are met by the beautiful Norma, young, sexy and alluring, who encourages them to stay the night and since there seems to be no-one else at the park they have a choice of cabins. As they settle down to sleep the previous occupants of the park, now eternally undead zombies, come out to play. It is fun to watch how the various failings of the youngsters and their preacher are exploited by the undead, all to a Southern rock beat. The preacher is first to go as he falls head over heels in lust with Norma and as she reveals her "true face" he loses his head, literally. Soon all the zombies are in on the action, a young man with a chip on his shoulder and obsessed with sex, is shown what it is like to be "penetrated" like a woman and then turned into beef jerky (he now learns what treating women like pieces of meat really costs!). In a rather startling scene he is injected with herbs, basted and then fried alive !

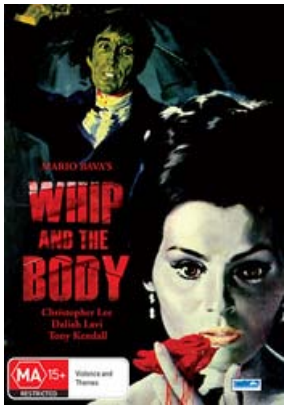
A young girl with a penchant for drugs thinks it is all a very fun trip when a zombie rocker turns up but soon faces the reality of it all when he cuts her arm off with an electric carving knife.

The demons at first explore the fears of the teens killing them via ironic means; however, this only lasts so long before the whole Trailer Park becomes a bloodbath of epic proportions.

Trailer Park of Terror is a fun, nasty, gore ridden ride through classic horror territory giving it a new twist with a dark sense of humour and great special effects. The zombies are awfully fun and the teens are annoying enough that you don't mind them being knocked off one by one. Sure horror puritans will argue that it doesn't have the required level of suspense or tension, but this is horror comedy, it is meant to be a genre cinema piece bringing together exploitation and horror cinema and it does so especially well.

Artwork ©2008 Trailer Park Partners, LLC

The Whip and the Body
Beyond Home Entertainment
R4 DVD



The Whip And The Body (1963) (*La Frusta E Il Corpo*) is a superb sexually charged gothic ghost tale matching the directorial brilliance of Mario Bava with an unmatched performance by Christopher Lee.

Kurt (Christopher Lee) has been banished for innumerous cruelties, one which resulted in the suicide of his last lover. He is the eldest son of the Menliff Dynasty which owns a sizeable estate. He decides to return late one night claiming that his contrite return to the family bosom is to ask forgiveness for his ways and to congratulate his brother Christian on his upcoming marriage. Christian is engaged to the beautiful Nevenka who was, at some time in the past, engaged to Kurt and is still very obsessed with him.

Kurt is not welcomed. He is a sadist with a penchant for the whip and is loathed by family and staff alike. The film actually opens with a servant pining for revenge against Kurt for the death of her daughter in front of a bloody blade which is kept in a glass case to remind the family of Kurt's violence.

While Kurt asks his father for forgiveness he has obviously not changed much. He begins to create trouble immediately, degrading staff and deliberately playing one family member off against another.

The Masterful Christopher Lee as Kurt

He takes up again with Nevenka and when she refuses him gives him a hell of a whipping on the beach, leaving her hysterical, if not a bit frenzied. When she is found, she is confused and mentally unstable. As she is recovering Kurt is murdered. The film seems, for a while, to move into whodunit territory as we everyone has a motive.

As part II opens, the Patriarch of the family is also murdered and Nevenka is seeing the ghost of Kurt everywhere. She claims he came to her one night and stripped him ready for another whipping. Is Kurt still alive ? Is there a ghost ? or is Nevenka obsessed with sex and pain as Kurt has claimed.

This is an unusual and controversial Bava film, released in 1961 under the director's non-de-plume John M. Old. It was severely cut over the years and released under such titles as *The Whip and the Body*; *What!*; *Night is the Phantom*; *The Way and the Body*; *Son of Satan*; *The Whip and the Flesh* and *The Body and the Whip*.

This release is nicely restored with both English and Italian language tracks and clear English and Spanish sub titles. The film is in good conditions for its age with only a very small amount of occasional discolouration. The cinematography is beautiful with amazing natural shots and a superbly gothic castle. Kurt's funeral with its dark imagery, red robed men and atmospheric lighting is quite amazing.

The film is constantly filled with intrigue and suspense and matched with a atmospheric ghostly plot. The family is a cesspool of dysfunction and sexual/emotional jealousies, while Kurt and Nevenka's sexual/flagellation obsession adds an erotic and fetishistic tinge to the film. Christopher Lee as Kurt is masterful, but all the actors perform extremely well. It is a film which has achieved cult status and rightly so.

The Witches
Mark of the Devil 2
Uncut Edition
DVD-R

Mark of the Devil II (*Hexen geschändet und zu Tode gequält 1972*) is the sequel to the original 1969 *Mark of the Devil*. Also known as The Witches and by its rather colourful title of Witches: Violated and Tortured to Death, it is a further exploration of the cynicism with which the witchhunters quested for booty of one kind or another.

The original *Mark of the Devil* was directed by Michael Armstrong and produced by Adrian Hoven and while filled with very strong content (and noted for its violence) also placed a strong emphasis on mood as well as plot. As can be discerned by the notorious alternate title, the follow-on now directed by Adrian Hoven, while having its moments, is more of an exploitation film which rackets up the torture and gore factor. That being said there is absolutely nothing wrong with a good dose of exploitation cinema and this certainly fits the bill.

The original actors did not all return but the performances are still solid. Reggie Nalder returns as Natas, he was excellent in the original and just as downright terrifying in Witches. It is clear the point being made with his name, while he may see himself as a witchhunter and the adversary of Satan, he is actually more evil than any possible witch or demon. He is such a disturbing presence that he really carries the show in both films.

Anton Diffring, who plays the head prosecutor of witches replaces Herbert Lom from the original and I think he really brings home the banality of the witch persecutions. He is such a bureaucrat, using his position for sex, chattel and property. Over and over again we come face to face with the fact that people were accused of being witches and hunted and killed for issues related to ego, sex and above all, property than anything else. The depiction of the way in which the simple innocent play of a child (such as trying to fly) or the dark humour of a wisewoman is twisted by the witchhunters into something demonic is very successful.

The story of *The Witches* is well developed starting with the simple premise of revenge. Alexander von Salmenau defends a witch against the brutalities of Natas, a witchunter, the count is killed and the witchhunters assistant dies when pushed into the frozen water by the counts very young son. This triggers a vendetta between the witchhunter and Elizabeth von Salmenau (a powerful and significant local figure) and her child. Soon accusations fly, tortures unfold and the brutality of the witch trials is displayed (if not exploited) in a truly brazen fashion.

There are moments which are truly electric, I felt the scenes with the child having to see his mother tortured and indeed being tortured himself for supposed having wolves teeth and a cleft palette (a sure sign of being a devil's child!) were especially atmospheric. The inanities the priest babbles quoting from Thomas Aquinas and others to prove how the child could be fathered by the devils sperm was both amusing and horrifying. Amusing in the sense that it was such rubbish, horrifying in that many people believed such nonsense and it cost so many lives.

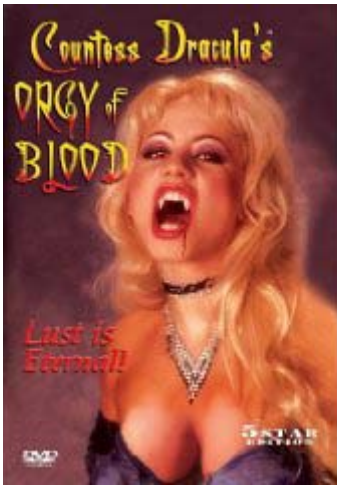
The torture scenes are suitably ghastly with all manner of innovations from heated steel shoes to being lowered on a sharpened wooden dildo. *Mark of the Devil II* while perhaps not as impressive as the *Mark of the Devil is* still a very successful work of cult cinema.

This is the uncut edition on DVD-R including an extra trailer and is a reasonable edition in English with burnt-in Dutch sub titles (they do not detract from the film). It is of good quality and includes all the sex and violence cut from earlier releases on video.

Trash Palace
Web: http://www.trashpalace.com

EROTICA

Countess Dracula's Orgy of Blood
Frontline Films
R0 NTSC (M)



I have always loved B Grade vampire films; Hammer films always took my fancy with their mixture of high camp, bad sets and women who seem unable to keep their clothes on. I don't think enough people get these sort of films today, while Hollywood blockbusters and extreme horror has its place, I like the playfulness and eroticism of this type of movie.

I was first introduced to Donald Glut's films with *Blood Scarab* and loved it; it was such a great mixture of horror clichés, beautiful women, eroticism and humour. *Countess Dracula's Orgy of Blood* is not quite as polished as *Blood Scarab*, it was made some four years early (this is a remastered re-release) and a lot has been learnt in-between, but still it is lots of fun.

The film opens with an "old West" vampire story. A gunslinger is constantly polishing his gun (!) while a lesbian vampire seduces his wife in one very raunchy scene. As the vampire and his wife escape into the night he calls his local priest and together they hunt down the vampires. Father Jacinto (Paul Naschy in his first American role) has lost his faith, but confronted by such evil his belief is renewed and he vows to stay in the spirit world until the evil is vanquished. He drives a special silver stake through the vampire's heart and we move to L.A. Today.

In L.A. today vampires live a very modern lifestyle, the female vampires like to do erotic sex dances with stakes and their retro look fits right in. Dracula himself decides to bring Lord Ruthven back from the dead since he believes he deserves another chance at "life".

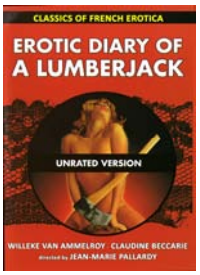
However when Lord Ruthven returns he faces a bleak future. The silver dagger has contaminated his blood stream and this means he cannot drink blood from any mortal, it must first pass through the veins of another vampire. This means he must revive his highly promiscuous lesbian sister Diana who caused his downfall in the first place by her uncontrollable lust and bad behaviour.

As he searches for his lost love Roxanne, he must deal with a priest from the spirit world standing in his way, his out of control lesbian sister and lots of other dangers. Filled with hot sex, voluptuous women, gratuitous nudity and one-on-one girl action it is a superbly guilty pleasure.

It has been beautifully remastered with superb picture quality and a DD5.1 soundtrack.

Frontline Films
Web: http://www.FrontlineFilms.com

Erotic Dairy of a Lumberjack (1974)
MVD
R1 DVD (E)



Reviewer: Bob Estreich

English Overdub

In an earlier issue we looked at the early French erotica of Jean-Marie Pallardy's *My Body Burns*. In that film the style of his future films was established – lush settings including many outdoor shots, very attractive women, lighthearted plots, and nothing that could really be called pornographic. *Erotic Diary of a Lumberjack* (French title *Foret aux Mille Desirs*) continues in this happy style. It follows Pallardy's successful formula but includes more women, more outdoor shots, more of everything really. It is a more polished presentation than *My Body Burns* and Pallardy was obviously getting into his stride as a producer.

The plot is fairly basic. Professor Muller, a Nobel Prize nominee, and his business partner have turned a forested area near a small village into an open-air brothel for jaded businessmen. The place is well-staffed by attractive and compliant young ladies to the point that the Police Minister is complaining of a lack of high-class hookers for the tourist industry. He is also concerned about the effect on French prestige if it became known that one of their leading scientists (or whatever he is a Professor of) is also a leading pimp. He sends police officers undercover to investigate and to dismantle the Professor's little enterprise. One of the investigators is an attractive woman and she starts to fall in love with the Professor's son (played by Jean-Marie Pallardy himself). So, on with the action. Lots of tasteful fornication, a farcical fight in a quarry, more fornication, policemen being chased by attractive women, fornication, and so on.

The film is tastefully done, the women all look happy, and the film is low-key funny all the way through. It has been well remastered and cleaned up, apart from a couple of minor scenes and the sound. The voice tracks are quite good but the background music is, as in My Body Burns, inappropriate, intrusive and poorly recorded. If the original soundtrack was of the same standard then they have done the film a kindness by overdubbing it. The extras include a long interview with Jean-Marie Pallardy, another 100 still shots of his actresses and some extended scenes that were shortened for the film.

The Mummy's Kiss 2nd Dynasty
Frontline Entertainment
R0 DVD (M)

The Mummy's Kiss 2nd Dynasty is Donald Glut's Egyptian erotic cult film from 2006 remastered and released in a special edition with lots of extra features.

Some people just can't accept they are getting old and will do anything to regain their youth. Having lost her looks an aging beauty conjures an Egyptian Goddess by removing her golden mask and makes a pact to regain her youth. The Mummy now seeks out three young, nubile and partially dressed women and prepares them for the "ever becoming younger" beauty queen to suck some face and steal their Kas (souls). Soon, after lots of sexy one-on-one girl action, there is a harem of love slaves at the museum !

What is to be done ? Along comes a young reporter who must face all manner of horny evil to save the day. Once again Donald Glut has given us a funny, sexy and ridiculous spin on a classic horror theme. The Mummy meets softcore with a bevy of naked women, lots of action and a typical Mummy horror plot. Sure you could argue that the plot is simply there to get lots of sexy girls naked and fondling each other, but heh! What's the problem ? *The Mummy's Kiss 2nd Dynasty* is loads of fun and doesn't take itself too seriously, it knows what it wants to be and does well at it.

The new edition is remastered with a solid 5.1 surround track and extras such as a commentary track, Behind the Scenes footage, Bloopers, Trailers and Still Galleries. It even includes a song called "The Mummy's Rap".

Web: http://www.frontlinefilms.com/

Sexy Battle Girls
Pink Eiga
All Region NTSC
(M)

Sexy Battle Girls is a bizarre and unusual "pink cinema" title from Pink Eiga. This is the very first time it has been available with English subtitles and is a true gem of bizarre cinema. It has been released uncut and unrated in 16 x 9 widescreen in Japanese with very clear English subtitles.

The film opens with a young girl called Mirai about to give up her virginity, as the rather Seventies sounding music plays and the love-play increases in intensity you have a feeling something is about to go wrong and it certain does; as her lover takes the next logical step his penis is squashed by her vagina. That's right folks; she has a unique weapon down below, a Venus Crush. It seems she has been in training all of her life to take revenge against the man who took away her mother when she was a child.

The truth of the matter is that her father just could not compete in the dick department and her mother went with the man with the biggest "tool". Mirai has spent her early life crushing bananas, apples and eggs in preparation for the day that her "weapon" can be put to use and save her families good name. This is certainly an outrageous beginning to the film and things just get better as the plot unfolds.

Okay, I have to agree that the plot to the film is ludicrous, but the sheer audacity of the story and the fetishism of the film creates a highly erotic and intensely amusing experience. So overlook the silliness of it all and go along for the ride !

Mirai Asamiya enrolls in a new school where the sleazy looking headmaster is the man who took her mother away with his large member. He also runs a prostitution ring, grooming failing students as sex slaves for local politicians and wealthy patrons, as we get to see on numerous occasions including the most explicit section of the film. These more explicit scenes have been filmed with a strange and quirky level of humour. I have never seen a sex scene which borders on XXX and yet uses what is clearly a rubber penis pump in place of a penis to give the whole scene a funny even laugh-out-loud feel.

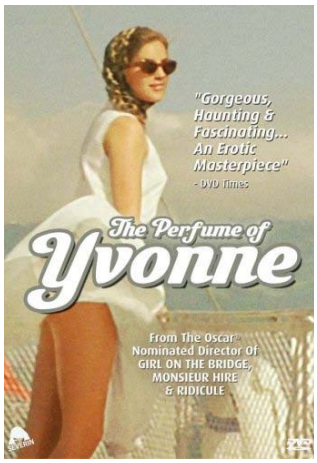
As Mirai tries to survive in the new school she finds that many of the other girls are out to get her. There are catfights aplenty with "ninja pens", "dildo weapons" and lots more; never mind the whippings the headmaster gives out when you don't live up to the school rules. Soon it becomes clear she must fulfill her mission and so with her Venus Crush now liberated from its chastity belt she prepares to take on the headmaster's lesbian leather daughter and then the "large-membered" headmaster himself !

This is an unusual pink film, the sex is explicit but not "XXX", in place of organs are various dildos and appliances so that the action actually seems more explicit than it really is and has an element of play to it. So while there is plenty of erotic activity with lots of breasts and ass on show, there is little actually which crosses the line, unless you are challenged by fetish and *Sexy Battle Girls* is filled with fetish; whips, chains, sex toys and lots more.

This is a very fun and entertaining film, it is filled with erotica; catfights, quirky sex scenes and a great sense of humour which makes it all seem so playful. I loved it.

Web: http://www.pinkeiga.com

The Perfume of Yvonne
Severin Films 2009
R1 DVD
(M)



The Perfume of Yvonne by director Patrice Leconte is adapted from Patrick Modiano's novel Villa Triste.

It is a light, euro erotic threat, filled with soft and sensual images and knowing glances. It is a story told by hints and suggestions, to really understand the characters you need to pick up clues along the way and come to understand the nature of the tale. It is a story told by colours, images and textures rather than by dialogue and narrative.

Hippolyte Giradot is Victor Chmara, a rich young claiming to be a member of the Russian aristocracy who lives a life of self indulgent leisure; he wants for nothing and gets what he wants. All this changes at a beautiful resort off Lake Geneva, when he meets and immediately falls in love with Yvonne, a young starlet who has only just appeared in her first film.

Sandra Majani plays Yvonne just perfectly, she may be the love to Victor's life but she is also very much an independent and self reliant woman. At the same time she is not really ready to settle done and this will cause some interesting negotiations between Victor and Sandra. Sadly this was to be the only film role Majani ever played.

The life they lead, however, is not all it seems. There are suggestions about Victor's past and enigmatic characters burst into the film adding to the strangeness of the tale. Dr. Rene Meinthe, for example, is the gay and flamboyant

friend of the couple, yet what exactly is the nature of his medical practise and why is he is shown in such a difficult light in the films flashbacks. It is a bleak and sometimes painful portrayal of life as a homosexual in Europe in the 1950s.

Throughout the film we are treated to dark flashbacks deliberately shot with a grainy texture to counterpoint them to the rest of the film.

This is a highly charged erotic film made with a superb view of what obsession is all about. Rather than being aggressively erotic it explores the nature of desire through superb cinematography and carefully constructed images.

Whether it be a simple touch or the sight of Yvonne at a distance; the film projects love, desire and longing. The sex scenes are authentic and natural.

It is unusual to see a romantic and erotic film that avoids being overtly sentimental and indeed includes a clear warning about being lost in passion.

Severin has brought *The Perfume of Yvonne* to R1 DVD with an excellent anamorphic widescreen presentation that maintains the film's original 2.35:1 aspect ratio. There are a small flickers and scratches in the opening moments but the rest of the film is fairly clear.

The audio is presented in the film's original French language with optional English subtitles. The Dolby Surround stereo track is dynamic with easy to read English subtitles.

The extra Leconte on Leconte Part 2 (part one is on *The Hairdresser's Husband* Severin's other Leconte release). It is a solid a 20 minute interview in which Leconte discusses three of his films: *Tango*, *Ridicule* and *The Perfume of Yvonne.*

Horror Cinema

Cross of the Devil
Cinema De Bizarre
DVD-R

I have always loved Hammer films and found they were a perfect mixture of horror, high camp and cult. *Cross of the Devil* (1975) aka *La Cruz De Diablo* is not really a Hammer film but it comes pretty damn close. John Gilling was the director of two of Hammer's more creative offerings The *Reptile* and *Plague of the Zombies* and after he relocated to Spain he made *Cross of the Devil* in 1975.

It is a rare film and sadly while Gilling's 60's Hammer films are well known, it is not. We were lucky enough to get a good quality edition from Cinema de Bizarre which has a Spanish language track and very clear English subtitles. It is actually a rather classic story based on a tale by 19th century macabre writer Gustavo Adolfo Becquer and adapted by the Spanish "Vincent Price" Paul Naschy. It seems Naschy was actually going to appear as the lead but after a nasty clash with Gilling was sacked. The story was rewritten to Gilling's liking and Ramiro Oliveros stepped into the role.

The Templars have always been a mainstay of Spanish horror films with Amando de Ossorio's classic Blind Dead Series *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1971), *Return of the Blind Dead* (1973), *The Ghost Galleon* (1974) and *Night of the Seagulls* (1975) being celebrated tales of Dead Templars taking their revenge on the living.

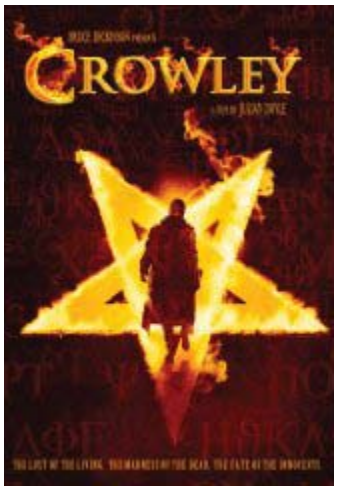
The story opens with the hashish induced dreams of author Alfred Dawson. He has a recurring vivid nightmare of a distressed young woman being pursued by what looks like Templars through a forest. He receives a message from his sister advising she is fearful of those around her after having a miscarriage. He travels to Spain to see his sister and discovers she has just been murdered. Soon he is caught in a web of intrigue involving her husband, his questionable assistant and Satan worshipping Templars and a Cross Made out of the iron armour of a once dead Templar. As he comes closer to the truth he finds witnesses to his sister's murder and then friends and acquaintances killed by a dark figure, whose identity will shake him to the core.

Cross of the Devil is a fascinating film, filled with luscious dream sequences and superb cinematography. It has an exotic mood accentuated by the landscape, castles and buildings. While it has a Hammer like feel, the budget certainly must have been better than a traditional Hammer release! The way in which the current tale is intertwined with a Templar legend from the past and other tales is intriguing and keeps your interest.

I highly recommend it, it deserved a lot more recognition that it gets and I am surprised it has not had a more general DVD release.

Web: http://www.cinema-de-bizarre.com

Crowley
Anchor Bay
R1 DVD



Crowley, released as *Chemical Wedding* in England, is an occult romp which uses the life of Aliester Crowley as its focal point. Directed (and co-written) by Julien Doyle from a script from Bruce Dickinson, it revels in "in-jokes" about Crowley's wild life and his unique form of magick known as Thelema. It gets off to a good start with an old classics professor becoming possessed via a virtual reality computer system and becoming The Great Beast himself. He is scheduled to give a classics lecture which instead he uses to quote filthy poetry and then literally piss on the audience after which he drops a large shit on a fellow lecturers desk !

While this is great fun the problem is that it is hard to sustain throughout the film. While Simon Callow is actually rather impressive as the drug addict, bi-sexual magician Crowley, the script is uneven and does not sustain the level of wit one would have expected of the role. Crowley was renowned for his wit, dark humour and style, yet after a while Callow's Crowley comes across as a bit of a bore. To really do justice to Crowley you need to have a script that embodies his immense sense of humour and education as well as his wild sexual predilections and occult speculations. Instead this is a "dumbed down" Crowley, I would even go as far to say it is Crowley seen through the lens of a Heavy Metal Rock star !

While supposedly using elements from Crowley's life and occultism, the film also continues the myths about Crowley. While Crowley certainly had an extravagant life, he never murdered anyone and to have him crucifying prostitutes when he returns from the dead is rather a stretch. If you choose to base a film around someone you either do it right or make it a general horror film with no obvious connection; if a film is named Crowley we should be able to expect at least some credibility.

While the film also throws a lot of occult ideas around as well as pseudo-scientific speculation, it really ends just being a sensationalistic horror flick. Now that is fine by me, I love B grade however. However, sadly it doesn't really do that very well either.

On the level of a B grade horror film it is very, very average, the plot veers from strange to at times undecipherable, the acting is very average (save for Callow) and the score is uneven ranging from Dickinson's own heavy metal to 1940's songs. The editing is jarring and at times you wonder whether the film actually jumped or the DVD is dirty, but no it is the bad editing. There is little gore, a few bits of nudity and lots of occult mumbo jumbo but no suspense or tension. Even Hammer horror films were better than this in that they knew how to create a mood; this is a film without any mood or atmosphere at all.

While *Crowley* may prove endearing to heavy metal fans, it will not satisfy either students of Crowley or horror fans so really fails on all counts. It was fun to watch once, but I certainly wouldn't go out and look for it if I was you.

Dead Girl
Sony
R4 DVD

Dead Girl caused maximum controversy when it was shown on the film festival circuit and on DVD it is just as confronting. Is this simply a misogynist, violent zombie film or is it a lot more?

Certainly the sex and violence is shocking and the sheer misogyny at times takes your breath way, but there is something under the surface here. This is not just an extreme exploitation movie; it is a film reflecting on the nature of suppressed male sexuality and the dangers of peer pressure.

Two dumb, dislikeable teen boys (Rickie and J.T.) skip school and armed with some brews head for an abandoned mental institution to get pissed and do some damage. They both have had little luck with relationships with girls (not especially surprising considering their characters) and express their frustration by tearing the building apart. As they get more and more drunk they decide to explore the tunnels under the institution and when attacked by a wild dog, need to find a way to escape quickly. They find a locked door and behind it is a naked bruised woman, covered in plastic chained to a table.

While they screw her in every orifice, rent her out to their friends and generally egg each other on to use her in every possible way, the sense of utter depersonalization could not be better displayed on screen. While it certainly is extreme cinema, it is also reflecting on such significant issues as the sexual suppression of teen sexuality, peer pressure and depersonalization and the way in which the focus of sexual attraction can be reduced to an object and nothing more.

The psycho-sexual horror of the film is matched by the filming, a dark urban landscape, disintegrating buildings, an emphasis on shadows, night and darkness. There are regular long and slow camera shots over pipes, dilapidated halls and broken windows, doors, rooms and equipment.

I can fully appreciate the shock many people may take to this film; we are dealing with long periods of necrophiliac rape and torture combined with obnoxious teen dialogue. At the same time the physical state of the woman deteriorates with each scene as her wounds don't heal and the violence increases, this is not easy to watch.

At the same time everything has its consequences and there are side effects from being bitten by the "dead girl" and when she escapes she certainly wrecks havoc.

There are some powerful motifs in the film if you can handle the sheer brutality of the subject matter.

As the boys become more and more reduced by their violence they decide to kidnap a "live girl" since the dead one is not longer in optimum condition.

The way in which they have become totally dehumanized by their experience of violence and "objectivization" is viscerally presented. At the same time the way in which the "dead girl" being reduced to an animal now responds as an animal suggests the effects of violence and abuse.

We never really come to understand how she has become what she is, but at the end when a new live girl is strapped to the table we come to consider whether this "zombie state" is a symbol for the ultimate form of consumer sex object.

Dead Girl is not an easy film, debates rage about its content, dialogue and misogyny, at the same time there is always the danger of a film being so "loud" that we lose its message. At times I think this is true with Dead Girl, the imagery is so severe that many people will not dig below the surface and consider some of the significant motifs underneath.

This is a challenging film, but cinema is not always meant to

The Devil's Tomb
Sony
R4 DVD

The Devil's Tomb is a movie based on biblical tales of Satan, possession and Hell. It is about The Gehenna Project (Gehenna is one of the Hebrew word for Hell) and an age old evil which exists underground and possesses those who come in contact with it.

It is a fairly worn motif using an underground-hell like environment, a devil figure and lots of possession with discoloured eyes and bubbly skin !

Director Jason Connery (son of Sean Connery) does take the elements he is offered and works to turn it into a film seeped in atmosphere and mood. The primary way he does this is to place the tale within the context of a war zone with all the related military action, fast action photography and flashbacks. Indeed the war flashbacks seen through the eyes of Cuba Gooding Jr as the military leader form a significant part of the film.

The acting is certainly solid with a good team including Cuba Gooding Jnr, Ray Winstone and Ron Perlman, even Henry Rollins plays a part as a priest ! The mixture of good actors, a military theme and some horror thrown in for good measure certainly makes an impression.

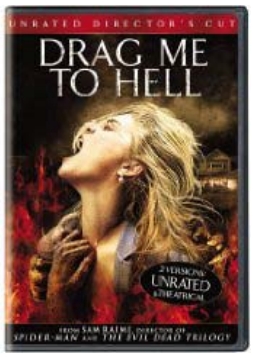
The underground environment packed with aggro military types mixed with occult and religious themes certainly works well, there is lots of room for shootouts and much blood is spilt. As a horror tale it certainly packs a nice punch in the action and gore department.

At the same time I have some misgivings, the plot is fairly well worn to death and Satanic possession tales really need to bring something new to the table to make a lasting impression. The balance between the military backstory and a horror tale is not finely tuned, the flashbacks tend to overpower the plot and the constant blurry, fast "war photography" becomes more than a little annoying.

Certainly as a horror story it works well enough and it has lots of action. It does show that Jason Connery has a solid future as a director and as his first directorial debut is pretty good.

My major gripe is that just these sort of horror stories are a dime–a-dozen and regardless of good special effects and great actors, they need to offer more in regards to plot to keep the viewer interested.

Drag Me to Hell
Universal
R1 DVD



Drag Me To Hell is the latest film by Sam Raimi who built his reputation with the *Evil Dead* series in the Eighties before moving on to direct *Spider-man 3* (2007). *Drag Me To Hell* harks back to his early horror days with many scenes being quite reminiscent of the *Evil Dead* style.

The film centres on the much hated world of bankers. Christine Brown (Alison Lohman) finds herself working in an office in which the men seem to make the rules and she is punished for being sensitive and caring. When a battle erupts between her and an obnoxious pushy newcomer for the job of Assistant manager, she decides to take no prisoners. She is sick to death of being asked to get sandwiches and coffee ! This leads her into a moral quandary over Mrs. Ganush, an elderly woman who comes in for a further extension of her home loan. Mrs. Ganush has already had two extensions and is clearly likely to default, yet to refuse assistance will result in foreclosure of the loan and losing her only home the same day. With Mrs. Ganush, as with so much of the film, Raimi has great fun playing with horror stereotypes and images. She is an old Gypsy woman with exaggerated yellowing fingernails, dentures which look more like fangs and a clouded eye, never mind that she takes her dentures out to suck the lollies which Christine has for customers on her desk.

Christine discusses the matter with the bank manager but knows if she grants Mrs. Ganush a further extension she can kiss goodbye the Assistant Managers job. She stands firm and says

no. She tries to negotiate with Mrs. Ganush about staying with her daughter or arrange temporary accommodation to no avail. Mrs. Ganush does the unexpected, she gets on her knees to beg, embarrassed and not a little horrified Christine calls security and removed from the Bank. Mrs. Ganush is shamed and soon she is babbling in a strange indecipherable tongue, it is clearly a curse.

Now the film moves into overdrive, ever possible horror cliché is manipulated to immense effect. While we know we know we are being played with, it still works; that's the amazing thing about this film. Raimi takes every possible horror technique and ramps them to a ridiculous level but rather than being kitsch, it ends up scary in a truly comic sort of way.

We have incredible scenes with Mrs.Ganush which are so over the top they are hysterical, we have a bizarre Indian seer Rham Jas, who likes to sprout Jung and a séance which has to be seen to be believed. Possession, goats, gypsies and a cat sacrifice; this is outrageous stuff.

The plot is suitably silly but doesn't try to be profound, this is a B Grade midnight movie on the big screen with a big budget. The acting is solid, Alison Lohman as Christine is credible and offers a convincing performance, even if her boyfriend (Justin Long) is a bit of a dolt and not particularly interesting. Reggie Lee (Stu Rubin) as her fellow office worker lets down the side and seems to overact in every scene. The real star of the show is Lorna Raver as Mrs. Ganush, she is so utterly repellent that you cannot keep your damn eyes off her. I love her !

There is so much to admire in *Drag Me to Hell* from the great cinematography and Raimi's trademark use of sound and weird camera angles to lots of messy gore and a sense of play which makes this a real winner.

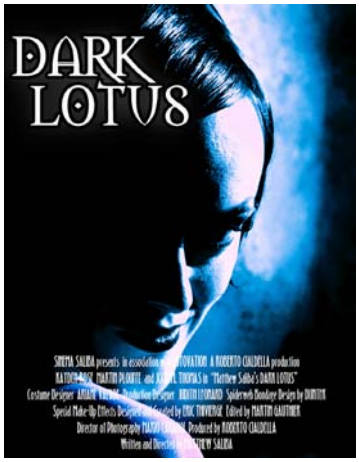
Frankenstein Unlimited
Sinema Saliba
All Region DVD
Web: http://www.frankensteinunlimited.tk/

Canadian filmmaker Matthew Saliba is well known to Synergy readers, he was the director of Vampyros Lesbos and his work is marked by an intense style which combines a dark vision with an erotic quality.

For the last two years he has been compiling an anthology of Indie short films, all by Montreal filmmakers, inspired by the themes of the story of Frankenstein.

There are six short films in all offering a bizarre journey through aspects of the Frankenstein tale as re-envisioned by such filmmakers as Matthew Saliba, King-Wei Chu, Matthew Forbes, Martin Gauthier, Peter James and Maude Michaud. It is certainly an unusual mix with comedy, eroticism, kung fu and horror, it is a challenging selection and certainly proves just how much creativity exists within the indie film scene.

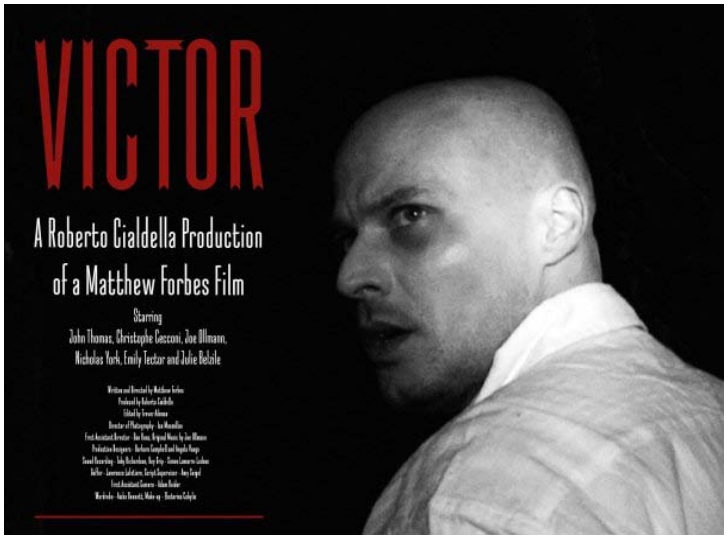
The film opens with Saliba's *Dark Lotus*, in my mind one of the best of the series. It is a dark tale, beautifully stylized with a stunning score combing electro with rock/goth songs. The film is presented using Saliba's still images which create the illusion of motion while allowing each image to seep into your unconscious. The way in which the images are shown at a slow pace then sped up during the violent attack on Dr.Orloff is especially impressive. As usual Saliba's work displays a powerful use of symbols ranging from the baby planted in the soil to the erotic dancer literally dancing a web to entrap her prey.



The appearance of the doctor "resurrected" later in the film by his "Frankenstein" lover is a fascinating twist, the cycle of creator and created and who is actually the "Frankenstein" is played out. It is also intriguing how Saliba moves out sympathy to the monstrous Dr.Orloff and his created lover rather than to the townsfolk.

After the death of his wife, Dr. Orlof attempts to grow himself a new lover in the womb of his deceased wife. Midway through the process, however, he is confronted by a violent mob of outraged villagers, who along with their leader brutally disfigure torture and murder the doctor. Believing him to be dead they leave satisfied, not knowing that part of his experiment is still growing in the next room and her anger matched with her skills will be put to very good use.

Victor by Matthew Forbes is a quirky short

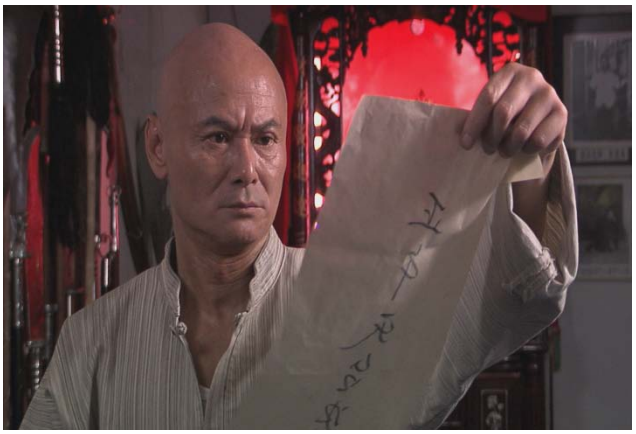


Scene from *Victor* by Matthew Forbes

exploring the consequences of Frankenstein's decisions. While he may have been able to create life from death it is not just the local community who think he has gone too far. Soon a denizen from another world (perhaps death himself) comes play a harmonica and looking for the doctor.

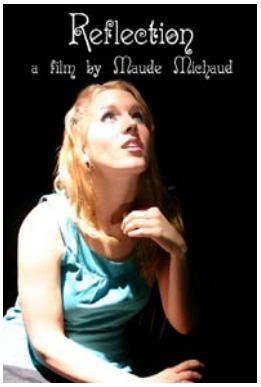
Flesh for Kung Fu by King-Wei Chu is fun, strange and amusing cult homage to both Frankenstein and Kung Fu films. It seems that around the world, Martial arts masters have been found murdered but that is not the worst of it, they have been mutilated and choice body parts removed. Soon there are two masters left. The "Kung Fu Frankenstein" believing himself to be now invincible, challenges his master to a showdown. We soon learn that strength comes from within and the true Master wins out leaving us with a Confucian analects to contemplate.

Reflection by Maude Michaud is another real favourite of mine among this collection. It is a modern morality tale showing the true nature of a monster. Anna is a young disfigured woman; she had a difficult alienated life and finds her



Scene from *Flesh for Kung Fu* by King-Wei Chu

place with a troupe of circus people, burlesque dancers and in their own words "freaks". She, however, is not at peace with herself and as soon as she has enough cash gets plastic surgery to make her "normal". When the surgery is complete it is not just her face which has changed.

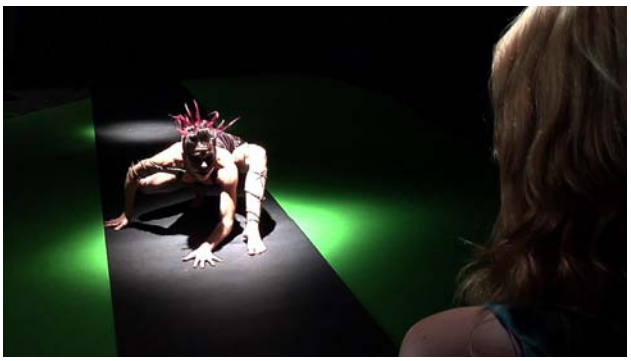


She denounces her circus family as freaks and treats them with disdain. Soon she is forced to face each one of them as they perform a stylized dance of "pain" showing how much they have suffered at her hands.

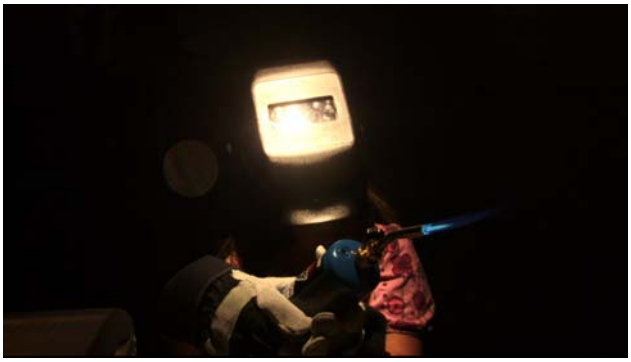
She soon realizes that she only became a monster after her surgery and cuts her face in an attempt to return to who she really was.

This is a powerful story, filled with superb themes about outsiderness and alienation. It begs the question of where does beauty lie and questions the price of accepting the "Hollywood" version of what a person should look like. It is a textured piece with some lovely burlesque, a great score and a mood which is haunting and well, reflective.

Burlesque dances from
Reflection by Maude Michaud



Superb cinematography from *Occam's Razor*



Mr.Fluffenstein

Occam's Razor by Peter James is a quirky crime take on the tale, filled with crime, sex, violence and mystery. Detectives Whale and Karloff have a strange but compelling case. Frankie and Mary have just turned themselves in for multiple murders.

But this isn't your average confession, Frankie seems unwilling to give them the information they need and Mary seems nonplussed even though she has confessed to multiple murders. As the puzzle unravels, an intense cat-and-mouse game ensues leading to a truth the detectives might not be able to handle.

The film has a beauty Film Noir quality, superior use of cinematography and some twists and turns which will certainly keep you enthralled. Just wait until the ending, it is not what you expect !

The final short, *Mr.Fluffenstein* by Martin Gauthier is surreally funny and marvellously silly. Alice, like any kid, is saddened at the passing of her cat Mr. Fluffy.

But after she freezes his body in the fridge and uses her advanced medical and technical knowledge to bring him back to life, has she gone too far ?

Soon the neighbours' pets are all turning up dead, is Mr.Fluffenstein to blame?

There is lots of play in this short, the parents of the suitably genius Alice are very amusing as they mix pride but also horror and dismay at their child's behaviour. The way in which the classic tale is adapted into a new story about a kid and her cat is innovative and very amusing.

This is a great collection of shorts; it illustrates to me the importance of Indie cinema and just how creative it can be. Here a group of filmmakers have taken a very well used tale which has been nearly "done to death" in traditional cinema and given it a makeover in so many unusual ways, from cult and comedy, to erotic and horror.

I highly recommend this collection to anyone who wants to see what a small budget but lots of innovation can achieve.

The DVD is an independent production and can be purchased direct from Frankenstein Unlimited: http://www.frankensteinunlimited.tk/

Friday 13th (2009)
Extended Cut
Paramount
R4 DVD

Friday 13th is one of the most successful horror franchises of all time, with its iconic hockey mask killer, Jason Voorhees, and eleven films thus far. It has outsold ever other franchise in the genre and spawned all manner of marketing product from Jason dolls to the hockey mask, arguably the mask is more iconic than Freddy's glove from *The Nightmare on Elm Street* series.

However, after so many different configurations of the slasher tale you begin to wonder what can be brought to the table in a new version. It is difficult to update an Eighties slasher to the present, CGI and special effects have come a long way and in the case of *Friday 13th* nobody goes to "holiday camps" any longer. So what the filmmakers have tried to do is to create a new interpretation of the mythos in the spirit of the original.

The opening black and white sequences are flashbacks to the original tale and set the stage nicely for what is to come. The first 30 minutes of the film is really a slasher story in miniature and hark back to the Eighties slasher a lot better than the rest of the film.

It is a classic tale of teenagers going camping (in this case looking for a dope crop since nobody would go to an old holiday camp these days), being hunted and slaughtered. It has some awesome scenes including being barbequed over a fire in a sleeping bag and a hachette to the head. Sure these kids are not greatly likeable, but they are nice enough working hard to get laid and having a good time. As we cut to the credits, it feels like the film has already finished, but it has just begun.

Soon we have a new group of college kids heading to a pad in the hills. This group is even more dislikeable than the first (if that is possible – sadly it is !) and you can't wait until they are sliced and diced. An additional character is Clay, who rides in on his motorcycle looking for his sister. She was among the first group, hence being the link between the two stories. He is only one worth a pinch of salt and is quite separate from the "rich kids" offering a solid comparison in personality and character.

The rich kids pad and the drinking and drug antics of what seem to be spoilt well to do college types is well portrayed but soon becomes extremely annoying. As would be expected it soon comes down to sex and death, they get laid and then Jason comes to visit.

Clay invades Jason's territory looking for his sister and soon Jason comes to take revenge. Jason is superbly portrayed and while not "supernatural" as in the earlier films, is impressively psychopathic. It is a strange film which reverses slasher conventions. Usually with "redneck" killers we side with the poor city folk killed (and sometimes eaten) by the evil inbred fiends.

Here is it exactly the opposite, Jason is the anti-hero and you just can't wait for the self obsessed rich kids to get a good dose of instant "Karma". The subplot with Clay, who while looking for his sister, is demeaned by Trent simply increases the feeling of contempt for the self obsessed characters.

As a *Friday 13th* adaptation it is fairly successful, the gore and violence while visceral and extreme, still has a certain Eighties slasher feel. The score is excellent with some great mood music; Jason is an impressive killer and the use of the story as a backdrop to the film adds a context which makes it work even better. Sure it isn't perfect, no remake is, but surprisingly this one works well enough and accordingly is worth the experience.

The Hills Run Red
Warner Brothers
R4 DVD

The Hills Run Red is an impressive new take on the slasher genre; using torture, gore, misdirection and lots of suspense to offer a merciless journey into the heart of horror cinema. The plot centres around a rare horror film called "The Hills Run Red"; it is a film which has literally disappeared only leaving a badly aged trailer, some photos and a poster.

Years later, Tyler, a young film collector decides to make a documentary on the missing film and tries to locate any surviving actors and maybe even a print. Through these early scenes we are treated to snapshots of the original film and images of its central character, the deformed Baby Face. Babyface is just a character from the movie, right? Wrong. He's alive and he's waiting for you.

Tyler locates the filmmaker's daughter and after helping her escape from a bikers stripers club he spends two days detoxing her from heroin addiction. In appreciation she decides to lead Tyler and his friends to the location where the film was short and her father's final resting place in the woods, telling Tyler he died some ten years earlier. She seems so sincere and honest, but are her motives really what they seem ?

While the film, at first glance, could be put in the same class as the "Scream" series, it is not a horror comedy. The self referencing humour is actually used to increase the suspense not as a source of quick laughs. For example, when they make fun of the fact that in slasher films most people go into the forest without a mobile phone or a gun, you are reassured that they know what they are doing and hence when things go horribly wrong you are even more confronted.

This regular use of misdirection is very effective. A prime example is that as they travel out of the city they joke that in such films city folk are regularly attacked and raped by rednecks. When they spent their first night in the bush the rednecks attack as expected, however Baby Face soon appears and slaughters the rednecks and himself becomes their major adversary. By playing with the expectations of the viewer *The Hills Run Red* sustains the tension right to the very end of the film.

The climax of the film is truly twisted as we find the line between reality and cinema blurring and come to appreciate the true "horror" of the original film. The truth about the filmmaker and his daughter is a real shock and a nice surprise. The fact that it mixes together urban legends of Snuff films, obsessive love of cinema and true madness makes it a very different plot from the current run-of-the-hill slasher film.

The violence and gore is certainly high and be prepared for lots of bloodshed, torture and the mandatory nudity and sex. There's a body ripped in half, a skull sawed in half, multiple impalements, a stabbing, a gunshot wound and lots more. The killings are presented in a nicely stylized manner, many reminiscent of Italian horror and Giallo cinema and certainly confront and astound. The cinematography is superb and the acting is superior. Baby Face is really quite an amazing killer figure and the sheer horror of his appearance adds an edge to the film.

The way in which scenes from the original "lost" film and flashbacks from the filmmaker's daughter are interwoven with attacks by Baby Face blurs the line between reality and fantasy and increases the nightmarish mood of the film.

I enjoyed every moment of *The Hills Run Red* and felt that it was a highly innovative, unusual and gore ridden addition to the slasher genre.

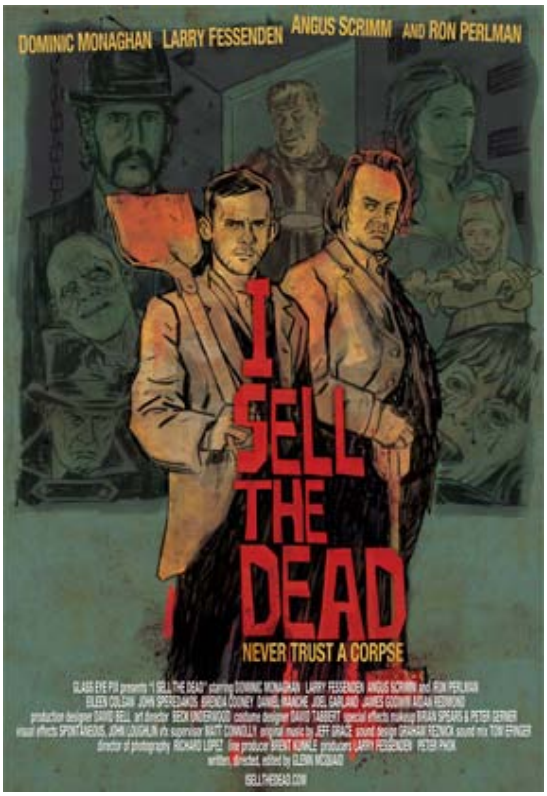
I Sell the Dead
Anchor Bay
R4 DVD

The world of grave robbers has been well documented in horror cinema, but what if a grave robber decided to trade in the bodies of the undead ? That is the premise of this startling and amusing horror comedy by Irish filmmaker Glenn McQuaid.

This is marvellously funny horror comedy which is a bit like The Twilight Zone, Fright Night and Creepshow with a dash of Hammer horror. It uses the traditional archaic look and feel of a body snatcher tale to evolve a different story involving all manner of beings from vampires and zombies to an alien baby ! It matches superb cinematography with great character acting and regularly cuts to comic book style scenes.

The tale is that of Arthur Blake (played by Dominic Monaghan) who is apprenticed to an older body snatcher Willie Grimes (Larry Fesssenden). Together they only just make a living stealing bodies for the terrible Dr. Vernon Quint, played perfectly by Angus Scrimm of Phantasm fame. They are advised of a body located out on the Moors near a cross roads and get the shock of their lives when it they end up being a vampire. They use the vampire body to dispose of Quint and enter a new career as body snatchers of the undead. It seems there are lots of “discerning” occultists and magicians eager to get their hands on unique bodies.

However, it is not all easy going, they not only have to face the perils of the otherworld but

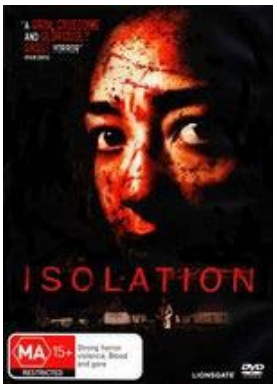


compete with the “House of Murphy” a rival gang of body snatchers who will do anything to get their corpse, even stealing them from other criminals. A showdown occurs on an isolated island where House of Murphy ends up being slaughtered by a rogue zombie. Sadly, Willie is bitten by the zombie and when they are caught by the authority Willie is sent to the guillotine, the scene which opens the films.

The tale of their escapades is told by Blake as he awaits his fate in a cell. Soon he is met by the strange Father Duffy (Ron Pearlman) who plies him with scotch in return for his life story. When it becomes clear to Blake that the father is actual the patriarch of the Murphy clan, a fight ensues and a surprise ending unfolds.

This is a witty, amusing and creative horror comedy. It offers a new and innovative spin on the grave robber genre and brings in all manner of quirky creatures as well as lots of suspenseful and horror moments. At the same time it sustains a high level of humour with excellent dialogue and superior character development. This is a film which really required superior performances to carry it off and all of the chosen actors excel in their tasks. It is a visually stunning film which uses various forms of animation and comic book presentation to make the graveyards, crypts and environments seem both dark and strangely amusing at the same time. This really is a great surprise and I loved it.

Isolation
Sony
R4 DVD



As *Isolation* opens we are travelling to an Irish farm in the middle of nowhere. The scenery is dark and presented in muted tones, the countryside is somehow imbued with a sense of threat and foreboding. Daniel has inherited the isolated farm from his father and to make ends meet has agreed to be part of a specialized cow breeding program. It is overseen by Orla, the local vet and a biogenetics company whose representative is the creepy John.

As Orla checks on the calf (half arm up the cows behind) she is bitten on the finger and believes something is very wrong, but John is convinced the fertility program is on schedule and the experiment continues. At the same time Jamie and Mary have parked their caravan on the road outside the farm, they are escaping Mary's family as Jamie is less than popular with them. John is far from impressed as the program is meant to be top secret. Soon the lives of this widely divergent group will be linked in a way they least expect.

As Daniel with emergency assistance from Jamie helps the cow give birth they realize something terrible has occurred. The calf has large razor sharp teeth and nearly bites through Daniel's finger. Orla arrives to investigate and has to put the calf and cow down. To her horror she finds the calf was already pregnant and after an autopsy finds the calf was laden with malformed and mutated foetuses. These creatures have skeletons on the outside and it seems at least one has escaped.

But that is not the worst of it, the modified genetic structure of these creatures is able to cross species and Daniel, Orla and Jamie are infected. As the property is quarantined a fight against time begins to destroy the mutated creatures. It seems their mode of reproduction is to burrow into a body, grow like a parasite and then claw their way out; not only are the cattle of Ireland at risk but anyone who comes into contact could become infected or worst a host.

It is amazing how a simple calf can become an image of terror and dread.

Shadows, rain and muted colours turn nature into a source of threat...

At the same time John will do anything to protect his biotech company from investigation and if that means murder to stopping the mutation spreading then he will do what he has to do.

This is a highly successful film filled with dread and horror, somehow the writer and director Billy O'Brien has been able to transform even simple images of the countryside and cattle into embodiments of visceral terror. Through superb cinematography using a predominance of shadows, an emphasis on night, rain and dilapidated farm buildings we have the countryside as a place of threat. Cows and calves, not usually seen as images of horror, are here turned into deformed monsters created by big business and genetic engineering.

Once again we have the classic science fiction theme exploring scientific experimentation without limits undertaken by a biotech company using big dollars to compromise vets and farmers alike. The emotive power of the exploited animals battling against unethical scientists is well played out in a well developed plot. Of course with current fears about BSE and CJD, foot and mouth and swine flu this is a timely film and it offers an excellent balance of storyline, character development and horror; the special effects are well done and the "shock" factor of animals giving birth, getting put down and so on is well used to create a very powerful story. While the storyline may not seem especially new it is surprising just how successful this tale really is; I highly recommend it.

Mother of Tears
Dario Argento
DV1
R4 DVD

In 1977 the face of horror changed forever. Dario Argento directed the film "*Suspiria*" which is seen by many as the very best horror film of all time. A dizzying collage of images, sound and colour, it had immense style, a powerful presence and a superb score. It is still a best seller on DVD today. Argento planned *Suspiria* as the first of a series of three films known as the Three Mothers Trilogy. Each of the mothers are powerful witches who control doorways to the netherworld. In 1980 Argento released the second in the series "*Inferno*", while perhaps not as well received as the first, it is still considered a significant horror film and is quite an experience.

Argento's work has had many problems in Australia. For cinema lovers too often his films have been badly edited for release and at times nearly cut to pieces due to the intrusion of censors. In 2009 complete versions of his major films are now available, many in collections from Umbrella Entertainment. Argento has made a lot of films between 1980 and now, many have been close to potboilers, others have been more successful. Now, some 27 years later, Argento offers us the third film in the series, *Mother of Tears* starring Asia Argento. In this very modern continuation of the tale only one of the great witches remain, Mater Lachrymarum, the Mother of Tears and this is her story.

An ancient urn contained three small statues and a knife is unearthed in a church cemetery in Rome covered in strange icons and symbols. A priest terrified of its possible occult links sends it to a museum for deciphering. When the urn is opened a Pandora's Box of hysteria and madness is released. The darkness spreads over Rome causing riots and uncontrolled violence. While Sarah and Giselle work on the urn, they are attacked by three demons and a monkey who split open Giselle's face and strangle her with her intestines!

While Sarah does not want to believe what she saw, she soon realizes she is now their target. As she begins to hear voices, have visions and her boyfriend's son is kidnapped she starts to realise the power of this strange cult. As she investigates the cult she meets a strange priest (played by Udo Kier) who explains the death of the first two powerful witches (in Suspiria and Inferno) and tells her about the remaining witch, Mother Lachrymarum, the Mother of Tears, who is the most terrible and powerful of the three.

As the goth followers of the Third Mother gather, Sarah must evade the police (who believe she had a role in the death of Giselle) and use her own psychic powers to defeat the great witch. While Mother of Tears is not in the same class as *Suspiria* or *Inferno* it does have a style of its own. The story is continued through references to the first two films so you appreciate the context of the continuing tale and there is Argento's trademark surreal use of violence and imagery. Certainly the violence and gore is higher than in his earlier films, at times the sheer audacity of the splatter takes it to the level of an artform. The acting is certainly solid Asia Argento is excellent and Udo Kier as a strange priest is endearing (as one would expect, he has never has a dull role). The score by Claudio Simonetti is nicely atmospheric.

There is much debate about the effectiveness of *Mother of Tears*, it is hard to judge it objectively since *Suspiria* is still considered the best horror film of all time. If, however, we try and look at it in isolation, *Mother of Tears* is visually appealing, dark, overwhelming and beautiful. Certainly Mater Lachrymarum is very different from the first two witches, who were older and more crone like. In this film we have more of a younger, sexier and certainly more naked witch but she is just as monstrous even if her goth followers give us a bit of culture-shock.

Mother of Tears does have it problems; some of the CGI is a bit sloppy. However, being fair, this is a film that clearly doesn't have the budget that *Suspiria* had and certainly cannot match the budget of mass market Hollywood titles. What it may lack in finesse it certainly makes up for in creativity and sheer style.

Skare The Prime Cut
2009
Sarcophilous Films

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Long-time independent director Michael J Murphy has produced a tight little bloodfest film here that includes murder, cannibalism, greed, sex and just a little of the supernatural. It is a low-budget film but you wouldn't know it from the quality of the production. The film was originally made in 2001 but was lost by a courier firm. Now remade in digital form, it's hard to see that it has lost anything due to the gap.

Dan (Warren May) has escaped from a mental institution in a country area of Britain. He was imprisoned when very young after he killed a bully in a fit of anger. Hunted by the police, he comes to an old mill that is home to a middle-aged woman, Martha Tennant (Judith Holding). She takes him in and hides him, but gradually takes control of his life. She wants him to build up his body ("a healthy mind in a healthy body") while he is hiding, and feeds him a healthy diet including her own herbal drink. She knows he is an escapee but tells him she often helps people in need. Dan gradually falls under her spell. It looks like Martha is a sexual predator and has Dan in her sights.

His nights in the old mill house are disturbed by strange dreams. He has visions of a murder and witch burning that happened hundreds of years ago. Martha tells him of a legend that the house is haunted as a result.

Dan's health and physique are gradually improving under Martha's tuition. One day he sees a young woman using the mill house's swimming pool. Martha tells him that this is Charlotte (Trudi Tyrell), who manages a Country Club that Martha owns nearby. Martha started there many years ago and gradually worked her way up to

head of the kitchen staff by her cooking skills. Her recipes are now the Country Club's main attraction and Martha has become a wealthy woman. Charlotte has taken over the running of the Club and continues Martha's culinary reputation. She also seems attracted to Dan, but she and Martha discuss Dan as if he is just a piece of meat. It seems Dan is seen as a sexual conquest by both women.

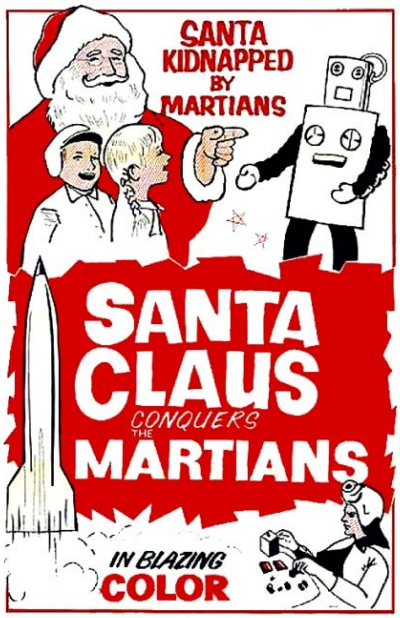
The only problem is a drunken bully named Steve (Bruce Lawrence) who works on a neighbouring farm. He has some sort of hold over Martha, something he knows "about what you get up to in that house", and is clearly blackmailing her. Is it something to do with the increasing number of missing people in the area?

We first get an idea what Martha's secret may be when a young cosmetics saleswoman visits her. Dan finds the results and is horrified but what can he do? From here the story plummets into the depths of murder and competition for Dan between Charlotte and Martha. Dan has been played for a fool by both women and it is only when his anger, suppressed for so long, breaks loose that he can also try to break free. But can he? There is one more secret he should know about the old mill house.

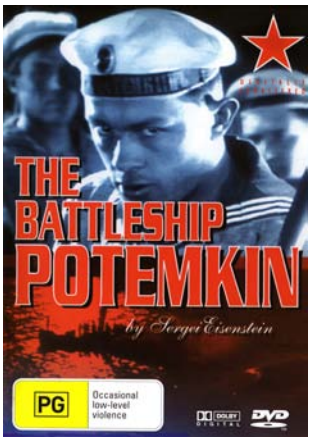
Skillful cinematography and direction give the film a slightly surreal look. The countryside is beautifully filmed but always there are the dark deeds in the mill house lurking in the background. Charlotte and Dan seem almost normal compared with Martha's predatory nature but both hide their own secrets. Every moment of beauty has something evil behind it. *Skare* is a skillfully made film with a lot of good suspense behind it. Don't let the blood put you off. It's a great watch if you like your horror done intelligently.

Web: http://www.sarcophilousfilms.com/

CINEMA & DVD



The Battleship Potemkin
Original 1925,
Reissue 2006
War, Propaganda
Russia
Force Entertainment
Beyond Home Entertainment
R4



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

The mutiny on the Potemkin in 1905 was regarded as one of the indirect causes of the Russian Revolution. In 1925 young filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein was commissioned to produce a film to mark the mutiny's twentieth anniversary. His work has come to be regarded as a classic and in 1948 was nominated by a critics group as the greatest film ever made. This was confirmed again in 1958.

The story, very briefly, is this. The Russian Fleet had been sent halfway around the world to battle the rising Japanese Navy. They were trounced by the Japanese and had to retrace their path back to their home port of Odessa. Nearly home, the Potemkin was detached from the squadron to do gunnery practice. This was not what the sailors wanted. Their morale was low, there was news of rising revolution in Russia, their officers were increasingly autocratic and sadistic and they were running short of food. When sailors refused to eat maggot-infested meat the ship's captain threatened to shoot some of the seamen. One of the mutineers, Vakulinchuk, persuaded the ship's guards not to shoot, but to join the mutiny. During the fighting for control of the ship Vakulinchuk was killed by an officer. His body was taken ashore at Odessa and placed on the dock where it was found next morning by the citizens.

The word soon raced through Odessa that there was a mutiny in progress on the Potemkin and the population sent gifts of food to the sailors to express their solidarity.

The Czar was not impressed and sent a force of Cossacks to suppress the revolution by any means. He also ordered the rest of the squadron to sink the Potemkin if it did not surrender. As the Potemkin left the harbour it faced the unknown – could they win a battle with the squadron? Would the squadron even obey its orders? They sailed head on into the squadron, who let them pass, in sympathy with their cause.

The film tells the story somewhat differently. Eisenstein had to keep in mind that he was making a propaganda film, so the words on the storyboards are a little flowery and unrealistic. He was, however, a craftsman of film and used the black and white medium to its best effect. He strengthened the contrast for some sections

Odessa Steps -*The Battleship Potemkin*

of the film, used montage to drive a range of emotions in a scene, and didn't have a hero which strengthened the feeling of solidarity and simplified the script. He took some dramatic license with the history but used this to produce a stronger film. He also intended that the music should be rewritten every twenty years or so, so that his film would not go out of date so quickly.

The title cards divide the film into a number of chapters. "Men and Maggots" introduces the conditions aboard the Potemkin and the uncaring officers. "Drama at the Harbour" covers the mutiny and the death of Vakulinchuk. "A Dead Man Calls For Justice" is where the Odessa citizens find his body and realise there is a mutiny going on aboard the battleship. Like the sailors, they too want revenge.

"The Odessa Staircase" is an event that didn't actually happen, but was used by Eisenstein as a dramatic device to show the Czar's brutality to his own people. Cossack soldiers loyal to the Czar are called in to disperse the crowd by firing on the thousands of demonstrators at the dockside. This is the most powerful and emotional scene in the film. It was possibly a reflection of Eisenstein having witnessed in 1905 a march on the Czar's Winter Palace in St Petersburg by local workers. The peaceful, unarmed workers were fired on by the Czar's troops. Eisenstein would have been very young at the time but the emotion he raises in the Odessa Steps scene must reflect his feelings. Although the scene is an invention there were confrontations throughout the city and many citizens were killed.

"The Rendezvous With The Squadron" has the Potemkin leaving the harbour to face its destiny. As the Potemkin and the Squadron draw closer the tension mounts until the last minute.

In a post-World War 1 Europe paranoid about rising revolution in its own workforce the film was not always well received. Most showings were shortened to fit the political realities of the time. Some scenes such as the Odessa Stairs were cut heavily as this level of graphic violence was a bit antisocial for its time. Even this reissue is rated Parental Guidance Recommended, 83 years later. Over the years a number of restorers have tried to reconstruct the entire film with bits and pieces found tucked away, but a full copy is so far not believed to exist.

There was no denying the film's power and influence, even heavily cut. Josef Goebbels later

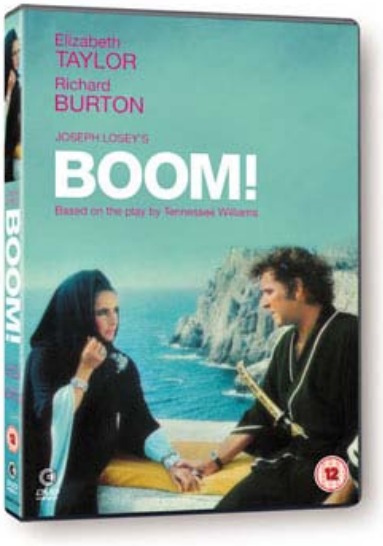
said that it was "*a marvellous film without equal in the cinema ... anyone who had no firm political conviction could become a Bolshevik after seeing the film*."

The bad news is that the film has not survived well. This version has been digitally cleaned up and I suspect the sound has been rerecorded but there are still many signs that we are watching a very old film here. You may not mind this (I didn't) feeling that it adds a more authentic look to the film, but as for transferring it to Blu-Ray – I think not. It is nevertheless very watchable and the mono sound in Dolby Digital comes over well. Unfortunately the subtitles have been placed over the text of the title cards with little thought for positioning and in many cases they are superimposed, making them hard to read.

There are poor-quality copies of the original film available for free download from the net, but after seeing this edition I wouldn't bother.

Technically its minimal cleaning up has kept the historical flavour of the original and made it easier to watch. In spite of the weaknesses, students of film will learn a lot from Eisenstein's techniques, historians will value it as a propaganda piece, and general viewers like me will just enjoy it as really powerful historically-based film.

Boom!
Second Sight
R2 DVD



Joseph Losey's *Boom!* (1968) is an absolute cult classic, starring Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton and Noel Coward how could it be anything else. It was controversial at the time it was released as it was marketed as a mainstream Hollywood film yet was really a European styled art film. Taylor and Burton were always complex individuals and by the time of *Boom!* decided to do something a bit different. This was the eight of eleven films they did together and is one of their most eccentric.

Boom! was based on Tennessee William's play *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here* which while an impressive work is not especially approachable, it twice failed on Broadway and as a film is certainly an enigmatic work.

The use of exiled American director Joseph Losey was also an interesting choice. Losey had been hounded out of the United States by the McCarthy communist witch hunts and now worked in Europe and Britain. He previously had been quite successful with his pop art film Modesty *Blaise* (1966) and hence high hopes were placed on Boom!

Elizabeth Taylor plays Flora 'Sissy' Goforth a terminally ill widow who has been married six times. She is unbearably narcissistic, has loads of money and has decided to spend her final days at an isolated villa dictating her memoirs to servant Miss Black. She lives in a state of drug induced reverie and fuels her memories with loads of prescription drugs, morphine, Vitamin B injections and booze. She is rather paranoid and protects her villa with a pack of wild dogs controlled by a dwarf.

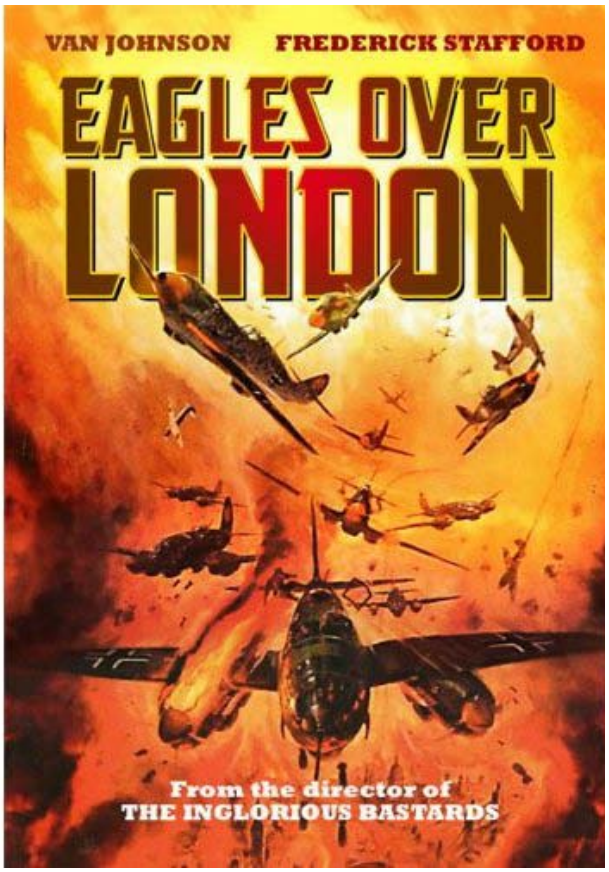
Soon her self induced isolation is broken when an attractive poet Chris Flanders (Richard Burton) arrives by boat and surviving a dog attack makes her acquaintance. While primarily a poet he is also an artist who makes mobiles designed to symbolize freedom and it seems he has arrived to free Sissy from her psychological prison.

Sissy's only friend is a psychic known as The Witch of Capri (played deliciously by Noel Coward) and she invites him for a special dinner comprising roasted pig and boiled "sea monster". The Witch begins his deep and profound divination and informs Sissy that the poet is really the Angel of Death in disguise.

He visits rich women before they pass on to the other world and liberates them from their physical possessions. Now Sissy is in a real spin, she is very attracted to Chris but less than excited by this news as she believes she has something rather significant to say to the world and wants to complete her memoirs before she dies. Unsure what to do, she refuses to offer any meals to Chris and spends her time screaming, hurling abuse and sparring with him.

As she degenerates into madness and the final stages of her illness, Chris becomes the Angel of Death, leads her through her dying moments, relieves her of her most precious possessions (in this case her jewels) and throws them into the sea ! The term "Boom!" is used time and time again by Chris for emphasis during their conversations and in the final stages of the final his voice becomes booming as it leads her to the other world.

This is an enigmatic film with lots of metaphysical and spiritual speculation as well as bitchy dialogue, lots of rages and insults and superb character development and interpersonal interactions. It is camp, fun, outrageous and a true cult classic, it is the favourite film of cult film director John Waters and it is hard not to agree.



Eagles over London
1969, reissued on DVD 2009
War
Italy
Italian overdubbed in English
Region 0 (all regions), NTSC widescreen
Distributed by Severin Films

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

This type of film has been called, not always kindly, “Macaroni Combat”. It is a mixture of footage from various sources, over the top action, and a total disregard for accuracy. Also known as Battle Squadron, this film was made by director Enzo Castellani with a lot of interference by the producers, who wanted as much WW2 genuine footage cut into the film as possible. They also insisted on a distracting “split screen” technique where various elements of a scene were played out in separate blocks on the screen at the same time. Almost in spite of this Castellani managed to turn out a fairly decent and entertaining show.

The plot is fairly simple. During the evacuation of Dunkirk a group of German infiltrators is slipped into the evacuees.

They are using identities stolen from British casualties and find it easy to get into Britain in the confusion. Their objective is to find and disable the British radar stations. The coming Battle of Britain will depend on putting these out of action so the German bombers can approach Britain undetected before the fighter squadrons can be launched. A British officer suspects their presence and a security hunt is started for the Germans. At a critical point in the battle the infiltrators decide on a suicide mission and attack the radar Central Control. If they succeed the German invasion can begin.

A competent group of actors was selected including Van Johnson and Frederick Stafford. Castellani got to work and produced some brilliant footage. His action scenes are first class and he is partial to blowing things up. His Dunkirk evacuation scene is magnificent – huge, sweeping and action-filled. Unfortunately it is spoiled a little by his using American Harvard trainer aircraft as German bombers.

This sort of obvious error haunts the rest of the film as Castellani continued relentlessly to make the same mistake. Historical authenticity went out the window and the film became a nit-picker’s paradise.

For instance, there was the CASA. This was a Spanish version of the German Messerschmitt 109 and was still flying at the time the film was

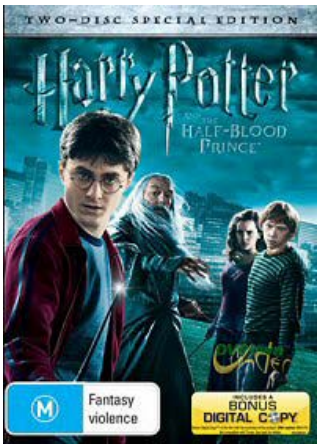
made. It had a Rolls Royce engine fitted that made it look like a Me109 from the cockpit back and like a pregnant Spitfire from the windscreen forward. It is huge fun watching this aircraft appear in German markings as a Messerschmitt, then in British markings as a Spitfire (the wing shape and the cockpit are completely wrong) and then as both at the same time in the air combat scenes.

To add to the confusion we have genuine Spitfires in German markings. Fake-looking models crash into the water. Genuine footage is cut into these scenes as well so in the end you can't work out who is shooting at what. Since the whole point of the story is the need to get the German aircraft over London, this should be distracting, but there are so many errors that it is hilarious. Rather than enjoying the film as a drama I finished up playing "spot the stuffup". Spitfires as nightfighters? British soldiers carrying Italian rifles? It goes on and on.

In spite of this (or because of it in some cases) it is still a good film after all these years. The plot was as credible as *The Eagle Has Landed*, Castellani's film work of bombed houses is poignant, the action scenes are savage and bloody. Even the lip-synching is pretty good for its day. Don't expect another *Battle of Britain* (made in the same year and incidentally also featuring the CASA again with more intercut genuine war footage), since this film is purely a drama, not a historical recreation. Just suspend your nitpicking for the duration of the film, sit back and enjoy it. Severin's restoration is excellent and the Dolby sound is clear.

Castellani went on to make *Inglorious Bastards*, another superb macaroni combat film that has also been rereleased by Severin. Quentin Tarantino was impressed enough to do a modern remake and an interview between Castellani and Tarantino is one of the extras. Another extra is a rare showing of the film in Los Angeles. The mini-documentary is called Eagles over Los Angeles.

Harry Potter and The Half Blood Prince
Warner Bros
R4 DVD



Harry Potter is a well established series of books which have a devoted fan base and which have been carefully translated from book to film. While the earlier films have certainly been impressive and entertaining, the maturity of this film is truly astounding. It has moved the story into a world which is conflicted, filled with teen angst and unsettled by the battle between good and evil.

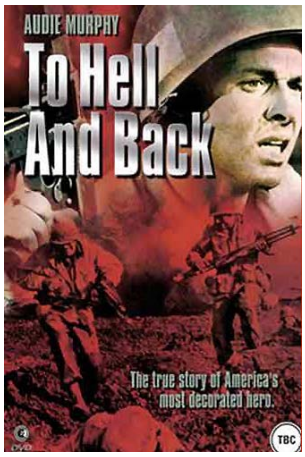
The earlier films has a real sense of kids action films even perhaps *The Hardy Boys* or *Scooby Doo*, as a team of friends battle the unknown; each tale is completed with an uplifting ending and the films marked by light-hearted content as well as the more challenging overarching storyline. In the Half Blood Prince things are very different, there is little "magical packaging" and the film has a more mature feel. The children are now young adults and there is an exploration of the pain of teen romance, relationships and competition but the focus is on how to deal with living with trauma.

This is a dark and at times reflective exploration examining how evil develops not from a monster or another world (which could have been an easy possibility within the Harry Potter universe) but from the distorted mind of a single individual. We come to appreciate how Tom Riddle, trying to fight off the one thing none of us can change, death, decides to deliberately split his soul by committing the most meaningless and destructive act of all, killing for its own sake. Slowly he is transformed from a lonely and underprivileged child into Lord Voldemort. This take on the banality of evil as it develops from poverty and suffering is significant to the Harry Potter films as it creates a real character out of Voldemort rather than a simple two dimensional cardboard Villain.

All the characters in the Half Blood Prince are very well developed; we start to get a much deeper insight into the main figures such as Harry Potter, Ron and Ginny Weasley and Hermione Granger, they are far more nuanced and textured than in earlier films. The true nature of Severus Snape is fascinating in itself and will not be revealed until the final film but his complex and at times confusing behaviour again makes us reflect on the nature on tolerance and how we cannot really divine other people's motives at a moment's glance.

Many have argued that this is not as action packed as the earlier films. Certainly it would be fair to say that it is a "bridging" film and offers a lot of the background story which will be used in the final film to create a true climax. In many ways you might as well have added a "to be continued"... sign at the end. That being said, the death of Dumbledore and the sheer intensity of emotion with which the film concludes is powerful and beautifully handled. While it may be a "coming of age" film, it is one fraught with pain and suffering and it honestly reflects on the innate complexity of life. While Harry Potter may be a hero figure and this is a film about courage and friendship, it is a post modern tale where everyone is flawed and all too human and I have to admire both J.K. Rowling and the filmmakers for combining a fantasy tale with such depth of character and significant themes.

To Hell and Back
1955, Reissued 2009
Universal
Second Sight Films
R2 DVD



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Audie Murphy was America's highest-decorated soldier of World War 2. Director Jesse Hibbs made this film based on Murphy's autobiography for Universal and until *Jaws* was released it was their highest grossing film. Murphy starred as himself in the film. He also appeared in *The Red Badge of Courage*, a highly grossing American Civil War film, but by the time of *To Hell And Back* he was moving to Westerns. He did not want the part originally, suggesting it be given to Tony Curtis, but finally gave in. His youthful looks were still there and he played himself convincingly.

The film itself follows his early career from a young lad off a poor farm in Texas to the end of the War, by which time he was a well decorated hero. He volunteered for the Navy, Air Force and Paratroops in turn but was rejected either because of his age or his short stature. Only the Army finally took him (reluctantly) and he completed his training in time to take part in the amphibious landings in North Africa. From here his unit took part in the invasion of Sicily, then on to Italy. Here he first displayed the courage that was to get him his first promotion to Corporal.

The landing in the south of France followed, then the long grinding battles through France and into Germany itself. In the course of these actions Murphy distinguished himself and was field-commissioned as a Lieutenant. He intended to stay in the Army after the war and was marked for training at West Point but a single gunshot wound in a critical place put an end to his military career. The film ends with Murphy being presented with the Congressional Medal of Honour.

The film is presented as a series of short battle scenes, following the oft-quoted comment that war is long periods of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror. This is probably how many of the combatants remembered it, with only the brief moments of action sticking in their memory. Each battle is beautifully recreated. The entire film shows just how good the Technicolor and CinemaScope processes could be, even allowing for the enhancement for this DVD edition. For a film that is more than fifty years old it is as fresh and clear as it must have been when first issued. Even the sound is perfect, although mono only (frankly I didn't even notice this until I read the notes).

I haven't seen *To Hell And Back* for many years and I had mostly forgotten what it was like. I expected a bit of a flag-waver but I was pleasantly surprised. I have seen nothing to suggest that Murphy's career was anything but what is shown here, and he comes across as less of a hero as a young lad who thinks quickly and reacts even faster. He is not shown as overly gung-ho but just as an ordinary soldier doing his job well enough to stay alive.

The friendships of men in constant combat and the loss of those friends is not glossed over. The political side is played down and the comment is made a couple of times that the soldiers generally don't know the wider picture – their focus is on the next battle or the next leave. Indeed the film could probably have benefited from being a little longer and filling in the soldier's life a little better, but at 107 minutes already Universal was reluctant to let it go longer..

I thoroughly enjoyed the film and I can see why it has become the classic that it is. Technically it is an excellent remastering job, and if you are into war films I am certain you will enjoy this release. Since mine was a review DVD, I don't know what if any extras will be included on the production DVD.

Mary and Max
2009
Australia
Icon Home Entertainment
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

It is very hard to classify this film. It is done in the old claymation technique, a form of stop-motion animation now only seen on Wallace and Gromit movies. It has comic elements but in so many places it is tragic, dealing as it does with social rejection and loneliness. It is, though, a warming story about friends, even those who have never met.

Mary Dinkle is a lonely eight year old girl living in one of the Melbourne suburbs. Her mother is an alcoholic and her reclusive father spends his time in the garden shed stuffing roadkill birds. Her mother has told Mary that she was "an accident" and she has little self esteem. She is teased by the kids at school and has no friends. One day while her mother is shoplifting envelopes from the local Post Office she picks a name at random from a New York phone book and resolves to write to that person.

Max is a forty-something lonely, overweight man who suffers from Aspergers Syndrome and a chocolate addiction. He likes an ordered, quiet life and any variation in his life throws him into an anxiety attack. He therefore has a lot of trouble handling his life in the city. Mary's letter triggers an attack but Max decides he will answer the letter anyway since an eight year old girl in Australia is not very threatening. Gradually through their letters they get to know each other better and are comfortable enough with each other to share their thoughts and problems. Max offers Mary some advice on how to deal with one of the kids at school who is bullying her and it works, so Mary's self esteem is bolstered.

Their correspondence continues as Mary grows up and goes to University. She even has the confidence to marry the Greek boy next door and is pregnant. At University she specialises in diseases of the mind, particularly Aspergers, and uses her correspondence with Max for her thesis. Her work is well received by everyone except Max. He feels betrayed and has a nervous breakdown that hospitalises him for eight months. Mary is horrified at what she has done to her only friend. She tries to apologise to him and even pulps her about-to-be-issued book but Max is incapable of answering her.

Mary's life now descends into alcoholism. Her husband leaves her and she plans to commit suicide. Saved at the last minute by a neighbour, she finds that Max has forgiven her. A year later she and her new baby finally travel to New York to meet her lifelong friend.

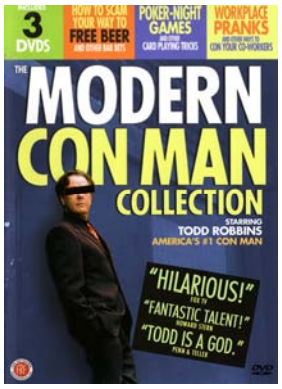
I have often felt that Barry Humphries is an aging drag queen who should give it up and retire, but I can't fault his narration of the story. Although his delivery has a slight humorous edge he can be very sympathetic during the tragic moments of the story. Tony Collette does the voice for the grown-up Mary and Eric Bana is the voice of the Greek boy next door.

Renee Geyer does the voice of Mary's mother. Even Ian ("Molly") Meldrum makes a guest voice appearance. Where did all these people come from? The film would probably have been just as good with unknowns doing the voices, but these people gave up their time to help make a cartoon? They must have been as impressed as I was with Adam Elliot's script and they didn't have the advantage of having seen the finished product.

Although the film has its funny moments it never makes fun of the big problems like mental illness. These are handled sensitively. Elliot's claymation work is faultless and his use of dull sepia colours for Mary's life and greys, blacks and whites for Max set the mood beautifully for each person's lifestyle. It's not really a film for kids but there are messages in there for them.

The film was made for around eight million dollars – quite a bit in Australian terms, and largely funded by taxpayer money. I think we have got our money's worth in this beautiful story.

The Modern Conman Collection
First Run Features
R1 DVD



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Do not, under any circumstances, play any card game at all against Todd Robbins. If he mentions "a little bet" plead death or insanity to avoid it. Although he calls himself a con man, Robbins is not in the class of say the Enron executives. As a card "mechanic", though, he is without a doubt the best I have ever seen.

This 3-DVD set covers three main themes – cards, workplace pranks and bar bets (how to scam a free beer). The three areas have much in common. The card tricks themselves are relatively simple the way Robbins explains them, and they rely as much on human failings as they do on good cardsharking.

This is part of their appeal – you could easily master a couple of tricks and go on to amaze your friends without the need to involve money. The tricks are often just good simple fun. There is also some useful information such as how to

pick marked cards.

The bar bets DVD is similar to the cards one, with good tricks that are obvious once you know how they are set up. If you don't know, then they are the sort of tricks that will leave your friends mystified. They will know there's a trick there somewhere but it's just hidden enough that they won't be able to easily figure it out. The workplace pranks DVD is a little more malicious and could lose you friends very quickly, as well as damaging some expensive office equipment. I liked this DVD the least since it could be humiliating to some victims. At least the tricks on the other two DVDs are done without malice and can be played as simple good fun.

Robbins' patter is delivered fast during the presentation of the tricks but he slows down when explaining them and you will find it easy to pick up what he has done from the clear cinematography. It is amazing just how easy some tricks are when you see them in slow motion being explained by an expert.

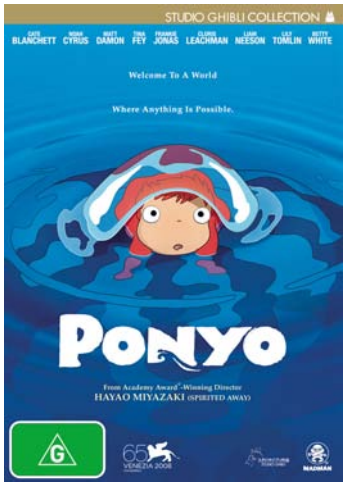
I also like the little factoids presented throughout the DVDs on the history of the games and tricks, definitions and other little snippets that enrich the tricks.

All in all it's an excellent presentation and I quite enjoyed it.

Todd Robbins is also well known as a "Carny". His DVD "*American Carny: True Tales From the Circus Sideshow*" offers fascinating interviews, stories and demonstrations of skills and tricks from the Carny tradition.

Robbins himself has made his living putting nails up his nose, eating glass and doing lots of things that are best not watched by the squeamish !

Ponyo
Madman
R4 DVD



Ponyo is a engaging and beautiful anime film from Hayao Miyazaki; it is enchanting, magical and poetic. I have always had a strange relationship with Anime; I regularly find it cinematically difficult and hard to relate to. However, there has always been one exception, the work of Hayao Miyazaki who gave us *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle* and other such classics. I waited with much anticipation to see what his latest film would be like and Ponyo is an utter delight.

Ponyo is a delicately made film, it could have so easily moved into a cloying and sentimental experience which would have been so full of sugar I would have turned it off. However, somehow Miyazaki contains the sentimentality and while the film is undoubtedly high on the cutesy factor, it kept me watching right to the very end. Ponyo and Sosuke while lovable are balanced by Sosoke's rather independent and straight thinking mother and even the old people in the home have a cynic among them. The various characters and elements of the story are masterfully balanced to create what I believe will become a truly classic film.

The story is a mythic tale centred on Sosuke, a five year old boy who lives with his parents on a house by the seaside. His father regularly travels to sea on business and leaves his wife to run the house and work a job at the local old people's home.

Sosuke finds what he believes to be a goldfish trapped in a jar and during his attempt to free her cuts his finger which she licks. Ponyo, however, is not a normal fish, she is a fish spirit and after tasting human blood her magical powers accelerate including the ability to move between the human and oceanic worlds.

Ponyo's father is not amused and wants her back home. When he discovers where she is she, he awaits the right moment. Soon Ponyo is captured and taken back to her underwater home. While her father may have the best of intentions, she does not aim to stay put. She is not content to live in a bubble under the ocean and by the strength of her will sprouts arms and legs and triggers an ecological crisis by tipping the balance between the divergent worlds. It seems her mother is a Goddess and Ponyo is too young to realize the effect of her choice. The story continues with fascinating explorations of environmental issues, family conflict and the simple message that if you love someone you accept them as they are.

The animation in the film is breathtaking, the detail in each scene is astounding and the depth of colour, texture and form make this a visual feast. What I find so utterly astounding is that Miyazaki creates his work by hand and does not use CGI. Ponyo really stands as a work of art from beginning to end and is quite an amazing achievement.

The voice actors in the film range from Cate Blanchett to Liam Neeson, Frankie Jonas to Matt Damon; they all do a sterling job bringing life to these amazing characters.

Ponyo is a film which will delight, entertain and astonish viewers of all ages.

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Star Trek (2009)
Paramount
R4 DVD & Blu Ray

Star Trek was the longest running science fiction TV series (having started in 1966) and has spawned spin offs from cartoons to books and comics. The movies have all proved highly successful and ten have been made to date. It is hard to follow in the footsteps of such an established legacy, if you do not change, the sequel will be billed as "much the same" if you change too much, you will evoke the ire of the fans and the fans in this case are quite a devoted bunch.

The latest *Star Trek* film is a prequel and hence has been able to bring a totally new range of actors except for the appearance of the elderly Spock. This is an innovative choice as it means new life can be breathed into the characters and a younger and new audience can be attracted to the series. At the same time it does mean that you need to have characters which have "affinity" with the originals (Bones, Scotty, Spock, Kirk etc) and this has been remarkably well achieved. The way in which the new actors have been able to "walk into the shoes" of these well established characters is testament to their own skills and excellent plot writing. There is a sense of both nostalgia (especially for Trekkies) and innovation as these actors make these roles their own but still play homage to the heritage of the series and films.

The film opens with a battle between the U.S.S. Enterprise and an unknown vessel. Its commander, Nero, has demanded the captain come aboard and negotiate. Nero asks for the location of Ambassador Spock, but soon realizes that he is in the wrong time period and kills the Captain. As the crew is evacuated Kirk realizes that the auto pilot is damaged and stays on board to ram the ship into the attacking vessel. The crew are saved and James Kirk is born the same day but without a father.

Some twenty years later Kirk has scored well on all his exams but is a rowdy and drunken presence in his community. After a particularly messy brawl he is challenged by Captain Christopher Pike to follow in his father's footsteps and join Starfleet. As soon as he does trouble follows not far behind, but before he knows it they are on their way to Vulcan to investigate what seems like a natural disaster. Kirk knows better and alerts them to a possible attack and the action begins never stopping to the very end of the film. With a new and brash crew showing much younger versions of those we have come to know and love from Bones to Sulu, Chekov to Uhura and of course Spock and Kirk this brings *Star Trek* into the 21st century!

Star Trek is action packed, filled to the brim with nostalgia and memories for lovers of *Star Trek* and has its foundation in a solid plot. The character development is excellent especially considering these are young actors walking into well established roles. Some Trekkies have criticised the film as being too "action packed" but to be honest I think the franchise really did need a reboot. It has been around 43 years and the last film Star Trek Nemesis was made in 2002 and so something very new had to be done to bring it to a new and younger (and perhaps more cinematically jaded audience). Everything down from the new James T Kirk, rebellious, sexy and brash to the marvellously evil Erica Bana as Nero works exceptionally well. Simon Pegg as Scotty is a real joy and the different takes on Spock as both an older (and wiser) and younger character are fascinating.

Sure this is a film which emphasizes the whizz bang factor but what special effects they are! A beautiful looking film in which not one scene out of place. A marvellous addition to the *Star Trek* series and must see science fiction.

The Sky Crawlers (2009)
Nippon Television Corporation
Sony Home Entertainment
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Subtitled in clear English

This film leaves me puzzled. It has elements that are brilliant but it also has underlying themes that are darker and stay that way throughout the film. It asks more questions than it answers and even the answers are puzzling.

In an alternative world wars (both commercial and national) are contracted out to military companies. The current war is between Rostock and Lautern. Yuichi Kannami arrives at his Rostock base somewhere in Europe to take up his position as one of the base's fighter pilots. He is assigned a secondhand fighter that is in surprisingly good condition considering that its previous pilot died. He also appears to have an uncanny resemblance to that pilot. Yuichi is a "kildren" – a (genetically modified?) teenager who can never grow older. This preserves his reflexes and youthful stamina and makes him an ideal pilot. Where the Kildren come from is not explained. Yuichi's past is not explained either – he has some vague childhood memories but that's all.

The life of a fighter pilot is an odd one. In the sky they are alive but on the ground their existence seems flat and lifeless. Their entertainments are mostly drinking and sex, their parties are morbid affairs, their relationships with each other are only fleeting. They do not mix much with the normal adults who man the base. Their only purpose is to fight for the corporation until they are shot down.

In the sky, however, their existence is justified. It's not so much that they fly to live as they live to fly. They are at their most animated while they are in their aircraft but when they are back on the ground their lives go back to the dull flat day-to-day existence.

Sometimes a pilot will appear to reappear in the barracks as if he is a new man, but carrying his old habits. It's as if the pilots are periodically brain-wiped so they can begin their futile existence again with a clean mind. This is not explained.

Yuichi forms a relationship with the base commanding officer, the beautiful but disturbed Suito Kusanagi. She is another Kildren and has already had a child. Can it last? At the end of the film, after the subtitles, we find out.

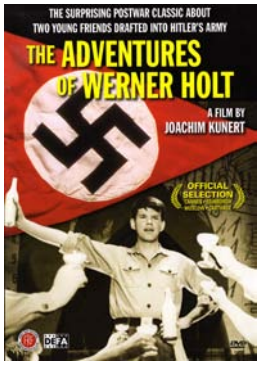
Director Mamoru Oshii said this film was intended to be a message to young people, but if so his message is depressing. Your life will be dull, your work will be your only pleasure, you can't change it? War is necessary, and you are the ones chosento fight it?

The questions and messages are wrapped in a gloriously drawn film that reminds me a lot of the 1987 Gainax classic *The Wings of Honneamise*. Even the aircraft have a similar style. The artists seem to have fallen in love with their aircraft because that's where all the detail is. By contrast the characters are drawn flat, unemotional and almost unresponsive. At least the aircraft have a purpose in life.

I am still ambivalent about the film, but apart from its unanswered questions I enjoyed it. You will be working out your own answers by the end of the film anyway. I would like to see a follow-up to develop some of the themes a little more, and so I can see those glorious aircraft once again.

WORLD CINEMA

The Adventures of Werner Holt
1964, rereleased in 2009
B&W
First Run Features
R1 DVD



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

In German subtitled with clear English

This great Joachim Kunert film is from the DEFA archives, the East German government archive. These films are being rereleased as time and resources allow.

The film opens with Werner, a radio operator, trapped in a bunker trying desperately to contact other German troops as the advancing Russians close in. In a series of flashbacks we follow his career in the Army that has got him to this point.

Werner and his best friend Gilbert are drafted into the German army during World War 2. Werner is cautious and retiring but Gilbert is all for the war – he wants to go into tanks, where all the glory is. Instead they are sent to an anti-aircraft troop. The boredom of daily life is contrasted to the terror as the guns are bombed. The reckless Gilbert gets into enough trouble for both of them, especially with the other soldiers stationed at the battery. His escapades are often played down by his sympathetic sergeant and so he manages to keep going. Werner is noticing the bad side of the new Reich, especially on his brief leaves. People are being removed from responsible jobs if they have scruples about the work of the concentration camps, and Werner's first love is a girl whose parents have been killed for expressing discontent with the regime.

Following the destruction of the guns by bombing the two friends are transferred to an infantry troop in Silesia. At first they think the idyllic country surroundings are going to be a wonderful place to see out some of the war but as they enter the town they see the carnage caused by the SS. Civilian bodies are scattered everywhere and the local sawmill has been the scene of some unforgivable acts. Even Gilbert, gung ho as ever, is revolted by what he sees. Idle soldiers tend to get into trouble and Werner saves a local girl from rape, then saves the girl and her father from execution. That night they are attacked by partisans and the war returns to them.

The Russians are advancing on Germany and their troop fights a rearguard action against a superior enemy. We see the numbers whittled down in a war of attrition. Support and replacement troops are no longer available and finally the troop is down to fifty men. There is talk of desertion and some of the senior officers have already removed themselves from the front. Gilbert, now a sergeant, is in his element. He takes control of the remainder of the men and plans a holding action. One of his senior officers is caught deserting and they restrain the officer by getting him drunk so they can hand him over to the SS. The SS is now hanging deserters.

During the next savage battle the officer sobers up and escapes and denounces Gilbert and Werner to the SS as mutineers. Werner returns from the action in time to see his friend about to be hung.

It is ironic that the most dedicated soldier in the troop should be the one to be executed. Werner must make a decision – friendship or loyalty to the Reich? Such a film could not have been made in Western Germany. It seems to be intended as a reminder of the atrocities of war, something the West Germans preferred to forget. The swastika, seen throughout the film, is proscribed in Germany. Only in the Communist-controlled East Germany were the circumstances right to allow such a plot.

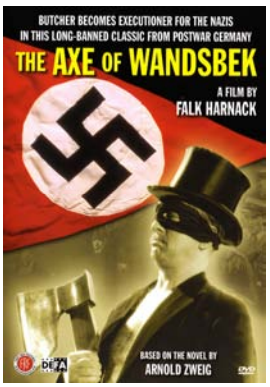
The battle scenes are particularly well executed, giving the film a realism and sense of futility. No matter how many tanks the soldiers destroy, them are more behind them. No wonder desertion is becoming a popular option. In spite of this the propaganda element in the film is insignificant – the film is a reminder of the atrocities of war, not a propaganda exercise.

It is hard not to compare the film with All *Quiet on the Western Front*. Although this was set in World War 1, there are similarities in plot as the reality of war is brought home to the new recruits. Many of the characters are similarly stereotypical, such as the experienced sergeant who keeps the lid on the boys' high spirits. Where The Adventures of Werner Holt excels is in its depiction of the less desirable parts of the war – its effects on the soldiers, the civilians, and the individuals who react in different ways to authority and power during the conflict.

The DVD also contains filmographies and biographies on the major participants and a short film on director Rolf Sohre.

The Axe of Wandsbek
1951, reissued 2009
Germany

B&W, German with English subtitles
First Run Features



This is another of the unusual but historically significant German films from the DEFA film archive. DEFA was the Film Archive of the East German communist regime and its films are now in the hands of the University of Massachusetts. The films are being cleaned up, researched and rereleased.

One of the mysteries of World War 2 is how the

Germans could have watched their country being taken over by the Nazis with so little protest. The Axe of Wandsbek may go some way to explain how this could happen. It is set in 1934 and the Nazi Party is assuming power. Many people see the party as a way to increase their own power and wealth. Albert Teetjens is a butcher in a Hamburg suburb and he is slowly going broke in the face of competition from newer, bigger butcheries. He cannot afford to modernise his shop or install refrigeration. In desperation he contacts an old friend from World War 1, Hans Footh. Footh is now a shipping magnate and a member of the Nazi Party and is working out how to profit from the forced sale of a Jewish-owned firm that operates tankers.

To gain influence with Hitler and the Party higher-ups Footh must overcome a local problem. Four Communists are in prison on death row but they can't be executed because the executioner is laid up with gout for an extended period. If Footh can "clean up the loose ends" and arrange a temporary executioner he will gain favour with the Party and even arrange for Hitler to visit Hamburg. This will give him the influence he needs to further his own interests in the shipping trade. He just needs a man who can cut heads off.

Footh convinces Teetjens to accept 2000 marks in payment for the four executions, to be carried out using his grandfather's axe – "best Sheffield steel". The axe is an old-fashioned butcher's axe used for splitting animal carcasses and is ideally suited for beheading as well. As a butcher, Teetjens knows how to use it. The money is certainly useful and his wife is happy, but she doesn't know what Albert has to do to earn it. Albert reconciles himself to doing the job and the executions are carried out smoothly. The prison doctor, a woman and a communist, accidentally finds out who the executioner was. She and her associates spread the word around the suburb and Albert, his wife and the butcher shop are ostracised by the local people. In a drunken moment Albert confesses to his wife. She is shocked. Her Bible tells her that he who sheds the blood of another man will have his own blood shed by man.

Their financial situation deteriorates again from the lack of trade and she is forced to start pawning the family belongings to meet the payments on the shop's modernisation. Their landlord is also starting to prepare for their eviction for unpaid rent. Albert and his wife are convinced that their bad luck is the fault of the axe and Albert tries to dispose of it, but through a series of coincidences it keeps being returned to him. Finally he decides to throw it in the harbour.

On his way that night to carry out the deed he meets an old friend who is now in the Nazi Party. The Nazis are the only ones who believe he has done the right thing and they buy the accursed axe from him as a symbol of how they will treat their opponents. More than a little drunk, Albert returns home to find his wife has hung herself, unable to face the social stigma of being broke and the wife of an executioner. Albert must also decide whether to take the final way out.

The ongoing theme of the film is hypocrisy. Footh is a Nazi only for financial gain. Albert in his own way also justifies what he has done for financial gain, but at least in his case it is to keep him in business. The Communists are hypocrites also. While their four comrades were in prison their activities consisted of printing leaflets. At least the Doctor was prepared to try to appeal their death sentences, since the convictions are obviously based on faked evidence, but even she is not prepared to go so far as to provide one prisoner with a file to cut his way out of prison. The citizens particularly are hypocritical in their treatment of the Teetjens. They openly welcome Hitler to their town for political advantage but disapprove of the man who carries out the punishments set down by Hitler's state. Many know the trials of the Communists were a sham and the evidence was false, but no-one is game to publicly question the verdicts. Strangely the only ones who don't appear to show hypocrisy are the Nazis themselves.

Against this background Teetjens emerges as a tragic figure who made one small mistake and pays massively for it.

The director, Falk Harnack, was criticised by the East German communists for making Teetjens too sympathetic a character and the film was withdrawn after a very brief period. Or was it because the new Communist regime in East Germany thought the depiction of their comrades a little unsympathetic? Either way it was Harnack's first and last film for DEFA. It hit him particularly hard because he and his family were strongly anti-Nazi and two of his family were executed during the war.

The DVD includes a short film on Director Falk Harnack and an essay on Arnold Zweig, the German-Jewish writer on whose book the film is based. As usual the film appears to have been remastered from an excellent original.

Chocolate
Eastern Eye
Madman (2009)
R4 DVD

Chocolate is an unusual film. The traditional portrayal of people with autism in Western films is generally sentimental. While the focus is usually on their ability to overcome their limitations, so often it is within the context of the nuclear family with an emphasis on emotional conflicts and interpersonal difficulties.

Chocolate presents a very different approach; the first thirty minutes create a real sense of connection with a child growing with a learning disability, at the same time within this framework there is the constant intrusion of the real world, brutal as it is.

Her mother, Zin was a debt collector for the Yakuza, she betrays her criminal lover and becomes pregnant by Masahai, a Japanese Yakuza. Her lover, Number 8 is suitably unimpressed and haunts her every move. He shoots himself in the foot to show what she has done to him and later returns to do the same to her in front of her daughter.

As Zen matures she watches the boys learning martial arts next door and develops skills honed to a special level since her senses work differently to other peoples. Played by Yanin "Jeeja" Wismitanant she is quite a powerful character, matching innocence with violence, naiveté with

obsession. She is complemented by a range of other unusual but superbly inhabited characters including her Moom, a boy with a lesser degree of disability, and her Japanese father, Masashi (Hiroshi Abe). He is introduced in the film as a young boy strangely obsessed with imperfections and scars. Both Zen and Masahai are clearly "outsiders", they are people whose perception of the world is very different from our own; this recurring theme of "otherness" shows an impressive insight into conditions ranging from Autism to Aspergers syndrome and OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder).

However rather than focusing on these characteristics as disabilities, the film shows who individuals use them to their advantage in a world where life can be snuffed out by a single wrong move. They are also flawed characters; these are not "charming" folk with a disability. One is a Yakuza boss and the other is collecting loan sharking with menace; lots of it !!

I especially like the way in which these characters are shown as "real", sure they have disabilities, but they are just as screwed up as anyone else. Too often the Hollywood approach to portray the disabled as either victims or as saints, both rather condescending.

The film develops its true bite when Zin is stricken with cancer. Since Thailand has no medical support Moom and Zen uncover a notebook which shows a large amount of money outstanding to Zin from her earlier life as a gangster. To get her mother the funds needed for her treatment Zen turns into a warrior, fighting and collecting the cash needed.

Along the way she confronts all sorts of criminals, comes to meet her father and there is martial arts and fighting galore.

Many have noted that many scenes are clearly homages to classic Bruce Lee and classic martial art films and these just make the film even more special. This is really a very innovative take on the martial arts genre; filled with blood, brutality and violence and yet with a heart as well.

Delta (2008)
Hungary
ICA Films
R2 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Director Kornel Mandruczo has given us a stunningly beautiful but disquieting film set in the delta of the Danube River. It is a quiet area largely disconnected from the rest of the world where most travel is by boat and the people are old fashioned and insular and suspicious of outsiders.

Matyas Erdely's cinematography captures the feeling well with long shots across the delta and occasional closer shots of the people of the delta that make them look insignificant by comparison. Even during the procession of boats to a funeral, he cannot resist pulling the lens back for a broad shot to show how minor the people are in the landscape.

Mihail has returned to the delta after having left as a young boy. His background is unclear but he has come back intending to settle on the land owned by his father until his death. His

mother has remarried to a bullying, loutish man and Mihail is surprised to find he has a half-sister, Fauna. She is a quiet, fragile downtrodden girl but decides she will leave her mother and stepfather and move into an old hut with Mihail. He intends to use the money he has saved to build a new house out over the water and she will help him do this. The coarse, suspicious villagers are scandalised and imagine the worst about the couple, although their relationship is simply that of brother and sister discovering each other's existence.

On one of her trips to town she packs her bag to move her possessions in with Mihail, but is intercepted by her stepfather. He rapes her and she is now firmly committed to Mihail who nurses her through her trauma. The inevitable happens and they become lovers.

The new house is largely finished. Mihail has had a large catch of fish and arranges a housewarming party for the villagers. The party turns violent and the consequences are tragic, reflecting the villagers' abhorrence of incest and perhaps their underlying brutality in their harsh environment. Their social norms have been violated and it will end in tears and vengeance.

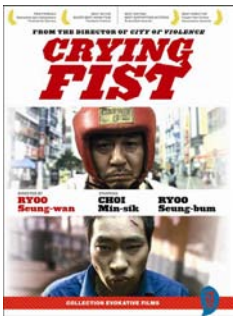
The development of the film is a little strange. Although we can see why Fauna would want to leave her family we find out little about Mihail. His past remains largely a blank and his emotions are submerged by his drive to complete his home.

The humans are minor players against the beautiful natural backdrop of the delta's waterways, and this effect is strengthened in the final shot.

The film moves slowly like life in the delta and the most active moments are during the building of the roof of the house – even the housewarming party seems devoid of any excitement. This slow development will not appeal to everyone but I liked the way it seemed to reflect the natural pace of the delta.

Delta is presented in Hungarian with clear English sub titles.

Crying Fist
Evokative Films
R1 DVD



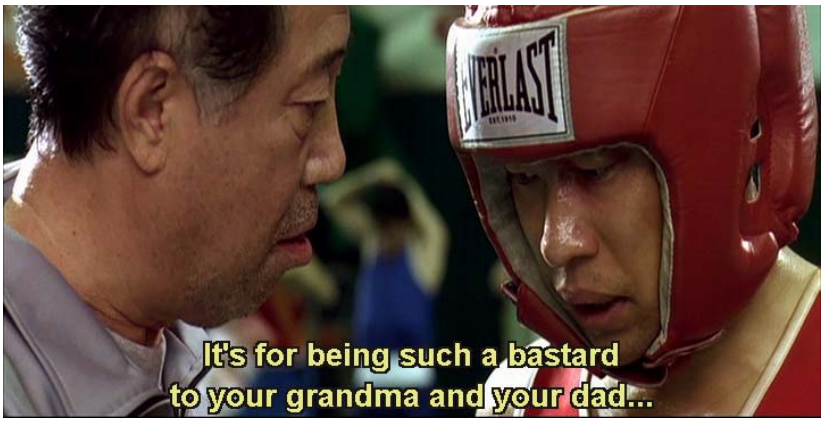
Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Korean with clear
English subtitles

Director Ryoo Soung-Wan has produced an interesting human drama that shows the seedy side of street life in modern Korea. He shows how depressing it really is and the things people will do to improve their lot.

We start with Tae-Shik, a man who once represented Korea in Olympic boxing and won a silver medal. He did this while training in prison. The medal was the one highlight of his life. He is now a drunk, deep in debt to the gangs, his wife wants a divorce and his son is afraid of him and embarrassed at his lack of education. To make some sort of a living he is hiring himself out as a human punching bag so people can take out their aggressions and disappointments on him for two minutes.

He is reasonably successful but is starting to suffer the ill-effects of being beaten up too much. His eyesight is damaged as is his brain and he has cracked ribs. He would like to win the upcoming Amateur Boxing Championship matches to restore his son's faith in him.



Sang-Hwan started early on a life of crime, beating up kids for money. In spite of his father's best efforts he remained self-centred, rude and brutal. He was not a very successful criminal and he eventually beat an old man to death during a robbery. In prison his fighting talents were noticed and he was also placed in the prison boxing team as a trainee.

This, it was hoped, would help him to become a better person. He is a proficient boxer but his lack of self-discipline and his inability to manage his anger mean he missed out on the vital place in the Championships. Now he is out of prison following his father's death. His younger brother has been cared for by their grandmother and it is a revelation to Sang-Hwan to find that she is rather proud of him. For the first time in his life he starts to think of others, and he determines to win the Amateur Championship to live up to his grandmother's image of him.

Sang-Hwan is younger and more agile but less disciplined and out of condition. Tae-Shik is over forty, well past his best, but fitter and a better boxer. When they meet in the finals there can be only one winner. Or is there a chance here for both men to regain their self-respect? The match is savage and bloody.

Neither man is really a hero. It is only during the boxing match that they each have something to fight for. If there are heroes in this story it is Tae-Shik's son and Sang-Hwan's grandmother. They never quite lose their faith and in the end it is that faith that brings out some good in both men.

No doubt there have been similar boxing stories before and there will probably be more to follow, but I liked this one because of its gritty natural look and no-larger-than-life characters. Give it a try.

Le Teuer
(The Killer)
Sunrise Films
and SBS Flms
R1 DVD
Evokative Films
(2007)

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

French with clear
English subtitles

I have a soft spot for French crime films and this first offering by Cedric Anger has only reinforced that liking. He has put together a tight drama of suspense, doublecross and impending murder.

The story starts with Dimitri Kopas walking into the office of share dealer Leo Zimmerman, posing as a new client. Leo has done a number of dodgy deals in his life. He is already nervous and somewhat paranoid, but he realises immediately that Kopas is a hired killer – someone has put a price on Leo's head.

Leo is strangely reconciled to the idea that he is to be killed. Even stranger, he comes to a deal with Kopas to hold off the execution for a few more days so he can get his life in order. Leo has many things to attend to. His wife is having an affair with his partner, his unethical partner wants to get involved in a really shady deal against Leo's opposition, and somehow he must organise his affairs so his young daughter is taken care of after his death. He confides to Kopas that the one thing he does not want is for his daughter to be raised after his death by his greedy partner.

Kopas agrees to the deal. He is staying at a comfortable hotel, he can kill Zimmerman at any

time, so he agrees to hold off until the weekend. If Zimmerman goes back on the deal, his daughter will die instead.

Possibly out of gratitude Zimmerman arranges for Kopas to meet a young prostitute, Stella, who keeps him company for the rest of the week. Kopas starts to fall in love with her but always keeps his mind on his job. As Saturday approaches the whole story starts to twist in subtle ways that suggest there is more to the contract than Kopas realised.

Much of the richness of the story is shown in the "downtime" scenes – Zimmerman's home life with his daughter, Kopas' quiet and rather lonely moments at the hotel, his moments of peace and love with Stella. This is not an action film, rather it is one where the suspense grows as we wonder what the ending will be.

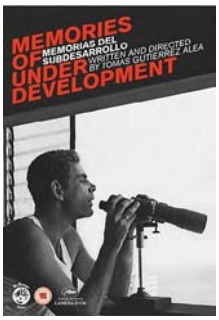
The ending is really three separate ones, and I won't give away the plot here.

Le Tueur is a powerful film with the opportunity for some good character acting and all the actors make the most of it. There isn't a bad performance in the film. The only negative I have is that the English subtitles don't always get all the nuances of the plot across. This is often a limiting factor with subtitles, so I won't hold it against the film.

Extras are an audio commentary by Cedric Anger and his first short film, "*Novela*", which is quite good in its own right. The package also includes a booklet with a complete cast list, Cedric Anger's commentary on how he sees the film and a review.

Evokative is to be commended for bringing this great film to us.

Memories of Underdevelopment (Memorias del Subdessarollo) 1968
Mr Bongo Films
R1 DVD



Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Spanish language with clear subtitles

This film was made to reflect on the times of Castro's takeover of Cuba and its effect on the people. We see it through the eyes of Sergio, a modestly wealthy bourgeois intellectual who has decided to stay in Cuba rather than emigrate to the United States. Cuba was finally coming out of its long colonial past but it was desperately underdeveloped both economically and culturally. Since Batista's revolution had scared away the tourists on which the country depended most of the people are barely eking out a living. Sergio's family business has been confiscated but he still has some income from blocks of flats that he owns.

As the film opens his ex-wife has left him to go to the U.S. Many of his friends are following. They can't see themselves as having much of a life or future under Fidel Castro, who has now taken control of the Government. Sergio rather loves his impoverished little country and has decided to stay and see how it turns out. He is ideally placed to follow the post-revolution redevelopment of Cuba, if that is what will happen. Meanwhile he must survive until the country gets itself going again.

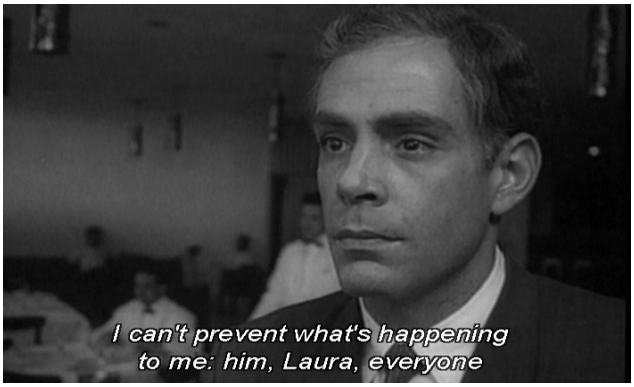
Although the revolution is over the international troubles are just beginning. The Bay of Pigs incident has soured relations between Cuba and the United States. Castro has turned to the Russians for economic aid and they are now shipping missiles to Cuba as part of the Cold War. American tourists could have kept the economy going but Cuba is now embargoed and the tourists won't be back. The people who depended on them are unemployed. There is a rather pathetic scene in one of the night clubs as some of the remaining bourgeoisie try to maintain their lives as if nothing has happened, but outside on the streets people are hungry.

Sergio finds his life a bit lonely as his friends leave and he turns to his housekeeper for some sort of sexual relief. He becomes a womaniser as he drifts through life, observing the events unfolding. Like most Cubans he only knows what he is shown on the nightly TV but the scenes and news clips intercut into the film show a country that is more concerned with international relations than with looking after its people. It seems Cuba simply cannot look deeply enough inside itself to realise how underdeveloped it is and to drag itself out of poverty and become a truly independent country.

The film doesn't labour the political aspects. Insulated by the carefully filtered TV news the Cubans are given enough information to keep them aware, but mostly they don't care as the daily battle for existence is more important. It would be easy to have made the film as a political piece full of slogans but Director Tomas Gutierrez Alea did not fall into this trap – it would have implied a level of political awareness that the underdeveloped Cubans simply did not have. Sergio, with his education and middle class background, is also underdeveloped. He has no political convictions or power yet his love for his country and his abilities could have made him useful to the Revolution. Instead he is just a powerless observer.

He finally runs into trouble when he meets and seduces the young virginal Elena. In the old days he may have gotten away with his actions but now he must appear in court to answer charges of rape. His personal life is disintegrating. The missile crisis is deepening. The government is taking more control of the country and young people are being drafted into Cuba's ever growing army. Time has run out for Sergio. His Cuba is now developing but perhaps not in the direction that he would prefer.

After seeing this film I must wonder if this is how many Europeans felt towards the outbreak of World War 2. To flee and lose everything or to stick it out and survive? Sergio has trouble adapting to the changing situation and this may also have been typical of the Jewish population of Europe. Watching the changes close-up through Sergio's eyes is rather frightening but it makes for a powerful film.



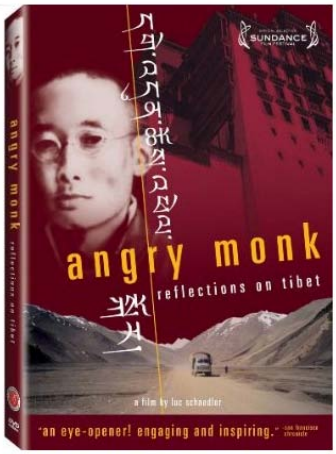
THINKING TIME!

Angry Monk: Reflections on Tibet
Directed and written by Luc Schaedler
First Run Pictures
R1 DVD

In Tibetan and English, with English subtitles.

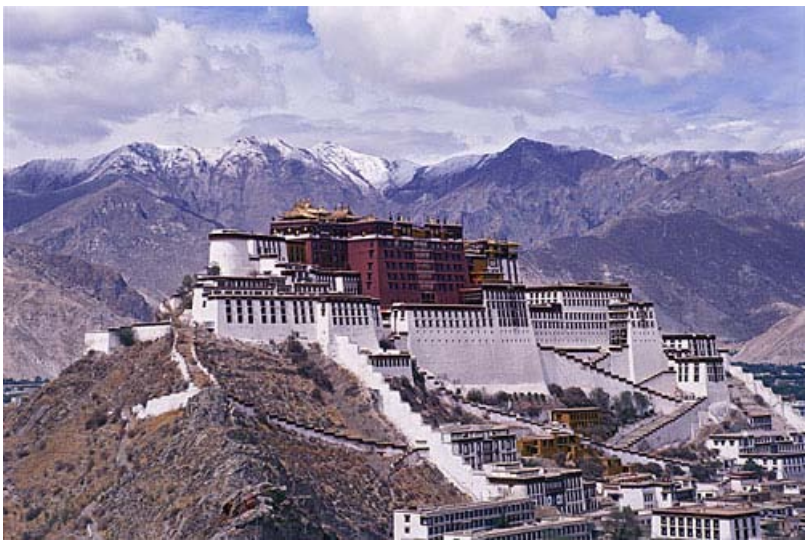
Some years ago I had the fortune of coming across a challenging book by Donald J Lopez called *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (University of Chicago Press 1998). Lopez argued that Tibetan Buddhism is totally misunderstood in the west and so many of the interpretations given to Tibetan Buddhism are actually new age in origin. He gave his book the title *Prisoners of Shangri-La* as he felt Tibetans were imprisoned by the dream westerners have of a utopia above the clouds, a bit like that seen in the movie *Lost Horizons* and seduced by the exoticism of a strange and non theistic religion.

This contradiction between western projections about Tibet and the real Tibet is the most obvious when it comes to Buddhist history. We could honestly say that most Westerners see Tibet through rose tinted glasses. Robert Thurman, a high respected American Buddhist academic, for example, once stated that Tibetan religious festivals were like a long version of Woodstock! A simple comparison may suffice. In Western Buddhist centres men and woman both receive teachings and philosophical and practical Buddhist teachings are offered to the public. Tantric initiations are readily available and generally it is seen as a fairly flexible spiritual system with few "moral" demands.



The Tibet of old is idolized as a great spiritual oasis and His Holiness the Dalai Lama is seen as the shepherd of a state in exile. The reality is a little more challenging. Tibet was a religious bureaucracy, some 25% of the state were in monasteries and hence families were left in poverty. It had a skeleton standing army with all the resources of the state oriented towards the monasteries which also controlled all education. Since the monasteries worked hand-in-hand with local commercial interests, corruption was ripe. The population was given no Buddhist education; this was reserved for the monks alone. The most a seeker outside the monastic system could hope for was a good reincarnation if they financially supported their local monastery.

The Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet



The Tantric teachings Westerners are so fond of were only available to monks who came top in their class after 12 years of monastic training! The

Gendun Chophel

Dalai Lama was seen as a god king, an incarnation of Chenrezig, whose word was law and understood to be that of the Buddha. This was no democracy. There was regular fighting between sects, including brutal suppression of dissent opinions even including beatings, killings and burnings of monasteries. (Zen Buddhism, for example, was banned). For quite some time the ruling sect in Tibet had been the Gelug (a strict celibate sect) so sex laws were strict, misogyny and homophobia was rampant and other sects, especially the Nyingma were persecuted. As can be readily seen this is the model of what in the west we could call a "Medieval and Feudal" society, very different from Western perceptions of Tibet as a Shangri-La.

In *Angry Monk* Luc Schaedler brings the viewer head to head with this other Tibet. He examines its history and shows the constant "give and take" between Tibetan and Chinese culture and slowly and carefully brings the viewer into an appreciation of a very different understanding of the Tibet question.

He wants us to realize that when China entered Tibet, it was at a pivotal period in Tibetan history. The old Buddhist leaders were intransigent to internal change and brutally suppressed those who advocated change, so some form of change was inevitable and a necessity for the good of the Tibetan people.

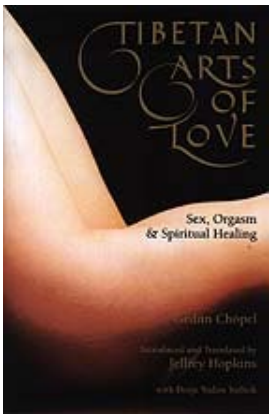
The central story of Angry Monk is about Gendun Choephel - a liquor-imbibing, sexually progressive Tibetan rebel. He rejected the monastic ideal of being detached from the world and created the very first Tibetan translation of the Kama Sutra. In the 1940's in frustration with the Tibetan authorities he became active in the Tibetan Revolutionary Party, which advocated overthrowing Tibet's Buddhist leadership. A rather talented artist, he designed the group's logo, a sickle crossed by a sword. For all his trouble he landed in a Tibetan prison for three years. Choephel died in 1951 but became a hero to many everyday Tibetans who began to realize that the Old Tibet was too slow to change and that revolution was inevitable, from inside or outside. His biography is still a best-seller among Tibetans who now see him as a freethinker who stood up against a corrupt hierarchy when nobody thought it was possible to do so.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Choephel's life was his research into Tibetan history. In a period when the monastic version was the only one available, he wrote a political history of Tibet that gave a very different version of Tibet's relationship to China.

This is a fascinating documentary which challenges many preconceived ideas about Tibet. It is filled with superb cinematography as well as rare archival footage. Schaedler doesn't offer a lot of answers and in many ways we are left pondering the future.

China has now turned Tibet into a militarized zone and yet the Tibetan government in exile is still firmly in the hands of a religious hierarchy. So what is the hope for a new Tibet ? This is a fascinating and thought provoking documentary.

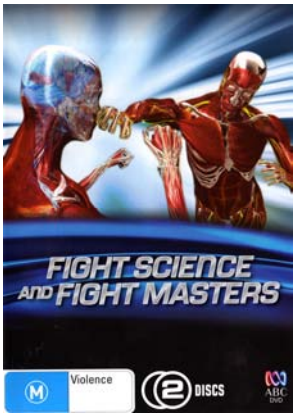
Tibetan Arts of Love
Gedun Chopel
Jeffrey Hopkins
and Dorje Yuthok
Snow Lion Books
1992



A Karma Sutra in the Tibetan tradition, containing the classic Indian 64 arts of love and the sexual methods for attaining bliss, harmony, love and joy. It also gives the methods of increasing the experience of bliss and emptiness for yogis who are meditating according to the two highest tantras.

The book includes a complete translation of the Treatise on Passion by the highly controversial Gedun Chopel, as well as an account of his fascinating life story.

Fight Science and Fight Masters (2009)
ABC DVD
Roadshow
R4 DVD



Which version of martial arts is the most powerful? The fastest? Are all those stunts in the Bruce Lee films credible, or just special effects? It's a good way to start an argument so a group of scientists, doctors, fast-motion cameramen and engineers set out to test the different stunts and martial arts and examine the strengths and weaknesses of each one. They were able to capture the rapid moves of the fighters and convert them to high detail skeletal overlays to study the effects on the human body.

The results, while a little overdramatised, are spectacular and interesting. Even a simple stunt like breaking a block of concrete with a punch puts incredible stresses on the human body and involves speeds and forces best understood by crash test engineers. The amount of preparation is important and in some cases the human bone structure itself must be gradually strengthened to compensate.

As for which art is the most effective, each form has its strengths. The engineers examine factors like impact, reach, injuries and stresses to the human body, and the effects of adding weapons to the human forces.

The tests are credible, a synergy between skilled engineers who know impact science and martial arts masters who know their form of combat. The physiology of the human body was well known many hundreds of years ago with a

detail that was critical in hand-to-hand combat. If you were only going to get a couple of blows in during combat you had to make each blow count on a critical part of the body. The masters know these areas well and explain them to us in simple language. Watching their moves in slow motion is more like a deadly ballet.

The verdict? Each art has powerful, telling blows. There are disadvantages as well. There seems to be no one sport that is clearly superior in all situations.

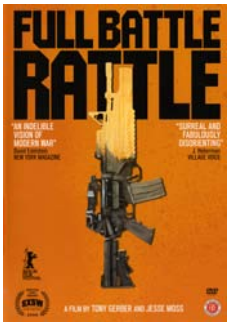
In the second DVD in the set we look at Mixed Martial Arts, a carefully regulated sport where a choice of blows, throws and grapples can be used. They are selected from a range of sports but regulation is necessary to avoid serious injury or death. Weapons, for instance, are not permitted. In some fights the throws and moves look more like one of the stunt wrestling matches but the sensors do not lie.

The participants are using carefully regulated full-on blows that deliver tremendous force. A one-punch knockout is quite feasible. The experts discuss the training needed to survive injury, not just dish it out. Again, though, there seems to be no one technique that is superior. There is also a lot more posing than is really necessary for a documentary.

This DVD set will not be to everyone's liking but I found it interesting because of the combination of science and technology explaining and evaluating these ancient martial arts.

It impressed on me that the techniques, while old, were still very effective. In fact in a genuine combat they could still be effective today. So yes, the Bruce Lee martial arts films are quite credible. I will look at them in a different light in future.

Full Battle Rattle
2008
Documentary, War
First Run Features
R1 DVD



Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Medina Fasl is a typical Iraqi town – dry, dusty, in the middle of nowhere, and populated by a small group of Iraqis who are just trying to make ends meet. It is also sited in the National Training Centre in Fort Irwin, California, in the Mojave Desert. It is a training centre for U.S. troops on their way to Iraq. Many years ago the U.S. Marines realised that their job would be easier if they could get the local population on side. They wanted to be seen as allies rather than occupiers. This made their job considerably easier, and the Army has now copied the idea. It is designed to expose soldiers to the sort of warfare they will encounter and to come to understand the local people.

Medina Wasl is populated by expatriate Iraquis who do their best to duplicate their positions back home. Some are already Americans, some like Nagi Moshi (who plays the Chief of Police) and Shareen (a village girl) are refugees studying for U.S. citizenship. We learn a little of their stories as well. Iraqi conditions are simulated as well as they can be, given that the town is really just a huge movie set and each exercise is more like a play. The soldiers rotating through the Training Centre will be exposed to insurgent activity, religious tensions within the town, suspicion and poverty. If they succeed in their mission of making friends with the Iraqis they will be "rewarded " with lower insurgent activity. They are even accompanied by simulated TV newsmen.

It is obvious that some of the troops need this training. Some are just rednecks and it is these men whose attitude must be changed. It seems to be working. Sergeant Paul Green now plays an Iraqi insurgent in the exercises. He says that during his previous tour of duty in Iraq "*in 04 and 05 we were just told to kick down doors, look for guns....*"

As the days go by and the troops become more familiar with the town and its people, a strange thing happens. Soldiers put up basketball hoops and provide soccer balls for the kids (soccer is a fanatical national pastime in Iraq). They wave to the kids as they drive through the town, and the kids wave back. When the Army Liaison officer

visits the Deputy Mayor he brings a case of fresh oranges, a rare treat for the villagers. We can see the attitudes changing as the townspeople become more than just "towelheads" to the soldiers. It may be just actors slipping into their roles, but the soldiers are starting to relate to the people of Medina Wasl.

The troops are not allowed to become too comfortable. The Deputy Mayor's son has been executed by religious radicals and civil war could break out in the town between the two main religious groups, the Sunni Moslems and the Shia. There are some areas where the troops can do little. Two civilians are accidentally killed at a roadblock, raising tensions in the town. The insurgents take the opportunity to attack the troops in a night raid on the U.S. base itself. This is followed by a savage attack on the troops next time they visit the village. The (simulated) death count is high.

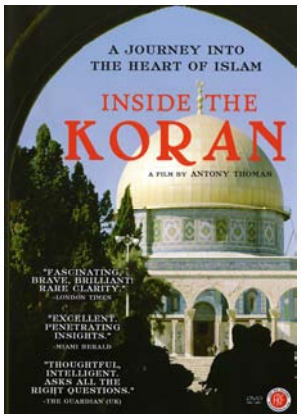
Violence erupts in the town in a revenge killing in payback for the death of the Deputy Mayor's son.

Many lessons are learned by the troops in this exercise. Hopefully they will translate into the real world when the troops go to Iraq, their next posting. Will this sort of training work?

The battalion went on to do fifteen months in Iraq with very few lives lost. Perhaps Medina Wasl was a success. The town is currently being converted into its next phase, a typical Afghani village. The Extras include brief interviews with some of the returned soldiers, the poignant family reunions after their plane touches down, and just to keep the balance there is an interview with Rahim Alhaj, a player of the classic stringed instrument, the Oud. He reminds us of the deep history and culture of Iraq before it was crippled by constant war and sanctions.

Perhaps the most poignant moment is a simulated newscast of the execution of the Deputy Mayor and his family in a payback religious killing. The violence goes on.

Inside the Koran
Antony Thomas
First Run Features
R1 DVD



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

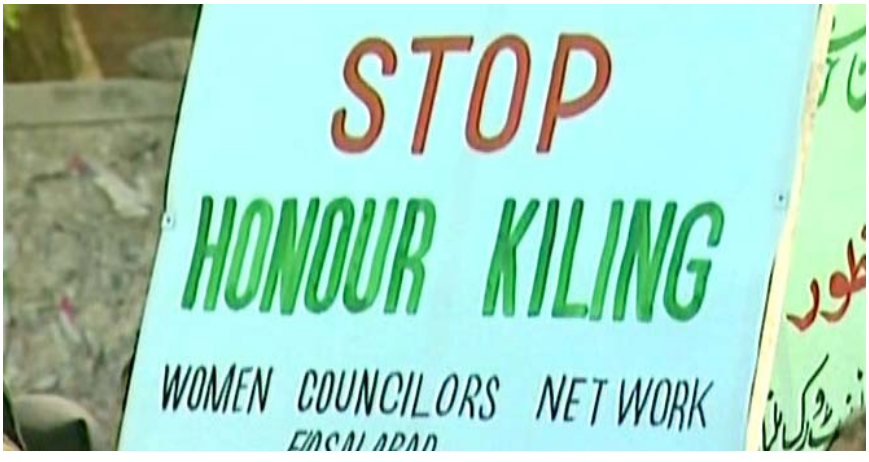
For around a decade or so now most people's exposure to the Koran has been in the form of Moslem terrorists using it to justify acts of cruelty, both to Westerners and to other Moslems. The documentary opens with a suicide bomber boasting of his coming martyrdom. What is the Koran about? Some say it is a book about forgiveness and getting on with your neighbours. Just as many use it as justification for terror, religious intolerance, repression of women and genocide. This documentary sets out to explain the Koran and the variations in its teachings, to discuss its history, and to show something of the ways in which it affects the lives of its followers.

First the documentary examines the history of the Koran. With around a billion followers it is a powerful book, but its history is later than either the Torah of the Jewish faith or the New Testament of the Christians. Indeed it draws on both and acknowledges many Biblical people like Abraham and Jesus as prophets. Unlike the Torah - Old Testament, which is a history of what

became of the Jewish people, or the New Testament which chronicles the times and words of Jesus, the Koran details the words of God to man as dictated by Allah himself to the prophet Mohammed.

The Koran should be a definitive work, clear and untouchable. Historical Koran research and archaeological finds have, however, shown a history of doubtful or careless translation, alterations (some as early as sixty years after the Koran was written) and additions, and commentaries written by people with their own agendas to push. The commentaries are often regarded as being as important as the Koran itself even though many conflict with the book's basic teachings. This has led to divisions among its followers, not unlike those in Christianity. Currently the two most powerful Moslem countries, Iran and Saudi Arabia, follow completely different interpretations of the Koran.

The rise of an intermediary class of Imams and Ayatollahs, each claiming their own place in the holy hierarchy, has not helped. Like the early days of the Catholic church they have set themselves up to be the intermediaries between God and man, although the Koran teaches that man can talk to God directly.



From the interviews in the documentary it is these parasitic people who seem to be the most dangerous to world peace

as their version of the Koran is taken from the most savage and unforgiving interpretations. A number of scholars note in interviews in the DVD that the Koran has verses that can be used to justify almost any opinion. They find this aspect the most disappointing part of the Koran.

The documentary goes on to examine a number of the features of the religion that cause confusion. The first is the role of women in the segment called “Living With The Veil”.

The wearing of head coverings is discussed, as is a woman’s role in Moslem society in the next segment, “Man and Woman”. Once again verses in the Koran or commentaries are quoted by different scholars to justify oppression of women in some countries, particularly Pakistan, where men are firmly and cruelly in control of the religion and its interpretation.

Female genital mutilation, a controversial area, seems to be allowable in some countries on “religious grounds” according to some Koran interpreters. It is not mentioned at all in the book – it is a much earlier pagan practice from pre-Koran times. Other examples are given where pre-Koran punishments and mutilations are justified on religious grounds, even though the Koran does not cover them. Stoning is one such example.

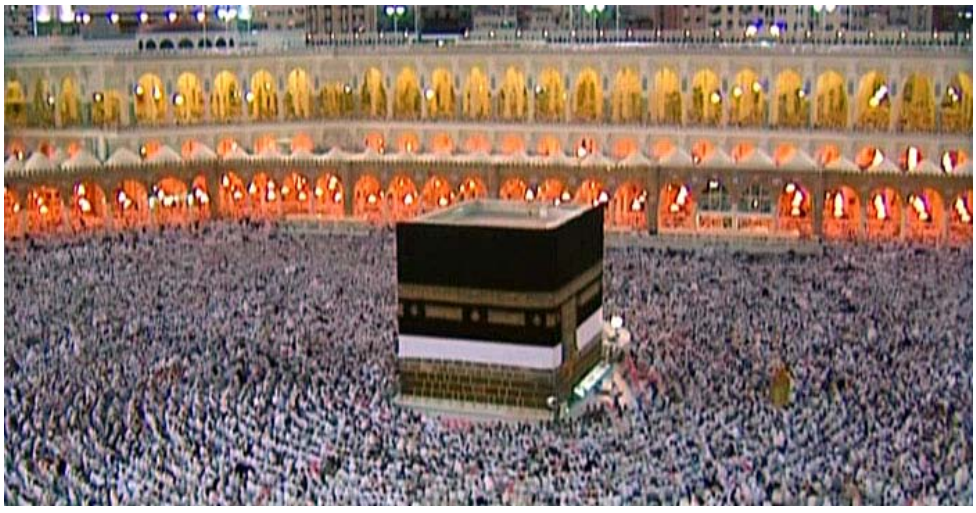
In another segment the savage treatment of criminals in some countries (amputation, stoning, beheading and hanging) is examined in detail. Once again the Koran is used to justify harsh treatment of lawbreakers. Scholars point out that the Koran preaches forgiveness if the lawbreaker is genuinely penitent but this is irrelevant to the hardliners.

The documentary points out that Iran’s religion-based courts have killed more people than China. To show how it should work, The film takes us to a Shariya court in the Gaza strip where Koran teachings and rulings are applied to domestic matters, personal problems and care of those in unfortunate circumstances such as the mentally deficient.

The Koran scholars who staff these courts show compassion and a care for the truth that is missing in their brethren further east.

“The Golden Age” casts a look back to the great days of the religion. The Koran was used to teach a level of tolerance that led Islam to become the great center of learning and thought. During this time Europe was bogged down in the cultural wasteland of its feudal Dark Ages, when the Christian religion had degenerated to superstition and new thought was actively discouraged.

“Tolerance and Intolerance” covers many of the areas where the three religions are interwoven. The Koran includes large parts of the Christian religion – Jesus is mentioned more times than Mohammed, as a prophet rather than the son of God.



In the undereducated countries like Pakistan, where the “religious leaders” have control, the opposite is true. Their interpretation of the Koran is unchallenged and conflicting opinions are not tolerated. Although the worship of Allah in these countries may seem just as fervent as elsewhere, it seems to be more organised and imposed than spontaneous. The Koran’s interpretation is strictly up to the clergy and their prejudices.

Unfortunately the conflicting verses in the Koran can also be used to justify intolerance. The interviews show a level of intolerance in the Moslem clergy that is at odds with the teachings of the Koran. Another source of trouble is in Jerusalem where a Christian church and a Moslem church occupy the site of the old Jewish Temple.

All three religions regard Jerusalem as holy but the relationship is very strained. Much of this conflict was caused by the attitudes of the European colonial powers during the 20th century, who simply carved up the Middle East between them. This has led to a strong residual distrust of Western countries.

Nor is the intolerance reserved for the West. In a number of examples and interviews the documentary shows the outright hatred felt between the various branches of Islam and their differing interpretations of the Koran, just as with the Bible.

The most intolerant group, one of the smallest, seems to be the Wahabi of Saudi Arabia. Although a minority group their oil money gives them influence and power beyond their numbers. It is hard not to compare these problems with those of Northern Ireland.

What do the ordinary people think of the Koran? Particularly in the educated countries like Egypt there seems to be a move back to the true teachings of the Koran. Followers find genuine moral support in their belief. This seems to be parallel to the rise in simplistic Christianity in the south of the United States.

So where does that leave our would-be suicide martyr from the opening of the documentary? He is following doubtful interpretations of commentaries that conflict with his Koran. Suicide is specifically forbidden in the Koran but he has been taught that this is war, not suicide. He is under the influence of politically-motivated Moslem groups who can selectively quote the Koran to justify any course of action to the weak-minded and undereducated. Due to a likely mistranslation, he will probably not end up in Paradise with seventy-two virgins to attend to his needs, but with a refreshing bunch of grapes and a long and happy life with his wife instead. He has simply been conned.

Is he so different to the fundamentalist deep-south U.S. Christians, or the hawks in the Jewish religion? Although the documentary does not go this far it is a comparison that can’t be avoided. For this reason the film should be compulsory viewing for all schoolchildren old enough to critically examine its message.

Perhaps the Koran can best be seen as a guide to living a rich, full life just like the Bible, but it is in the hands of extremists who have given Islam and the Koran a bad name.

Kansas Vs Darwin (2007)
USA
Director Jeff Tamblyn
Unconditional Films
Web: http://www.kansasvdarwin.com

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

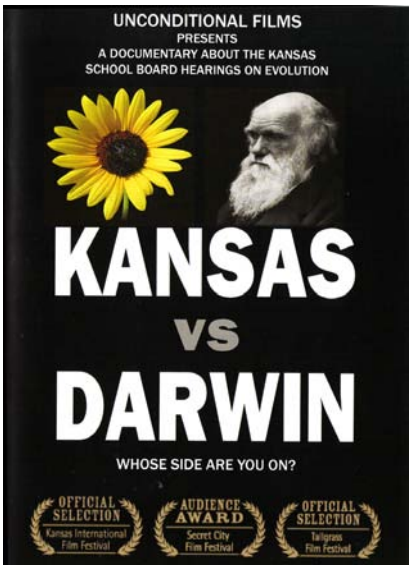
There are two kinds of people in this world. Those who crave certainty and those who seek understanding.

So begins this documentary about the ongoing row over Evolution versus Creation, now re-christened Intelligent Design. I am astounded that such a documentary needs to be made. Do the people of Kansas have no respect for their Constitution? It guarantees freedom of worship, but specifically separates religion and the State. In spite of this there are still citizens who feel it is their moral right, if not obligation, to force their brand of religious superstition onto young kids by teaching it in school. If they can't do it by persuasive argument they try to do it by legislation.

They are trying to push down the throat of Kansas children what they should know is wrong and by willful ignorance they're suggesting "we don't know if evolution is real"

The idea of legislating evolution out of schools and replacing it with Biblical creationism failed in the Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Tennessee in 1925. The state had passed the Butler Act that made it illegal to teach any other theory than creationism. A teacher named Scopes was charged with teaching evolution The case was defended on the grounds that the law would benefit a religion and was therefore unconstitutional, that belief in the simplistic Bible stories was foolish, and that the Bible had too many inconsistencies to be regarded as scientific and should not be taught in a science class. Much of the defence testimony was held by the Judge to be inadmissible and the jury was excluded during most of it.

Scopes was found guilty but the case was quashed on appeal on the technicality that the Judge had levied a fine in excess of that which he was allowed to do under law, and the fine should have been decided by the jury anyway. Other states tried the same technique and the matter was not finally settled until 1968. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that such bans on teaching evolution were unconstitutional since their purpose was to support religion.



The creationists wouldn't let it end there. In the last decade or so creationism has been reinvented as "Intelligent Design", a doctrine that proposed that if science couldn't explain a natural event then it must be due to the work of an "intelligent designer". The word God was carefully avoided. In the Kansas case the creationists changed their method of attack. They proposed that the definition of Science should be changed so Intelligent Design could now be taught alongside Evolution. This would give it the status of a science despite not conforming to any form of accepted scientific rigour such as evidence. One of the basic principles of a scientific theory is that it should explain observed evidence and be capable of being tested. Intelligent Design cannot be tested and so is not science.

Intelligent design ....the things that we don't know about the past can be filled in with supernatural explanations.

First, the Kansas School Board was stacked with a small majority of creationists. They organised a review of the Science Teaching Standards for 2006. In spite of the majority accepting evolution, they forced a public enquiry into whether Intelligent Design should be included in the syllabus. One lower-level schoolteacher stated I believe that it was required of me by God to run for the Board.

The enquiry was chaired by Pedro Irigonegaray, a Kansas lawyer. He refused any payment for the job stating that it would be taking money from childrens' education. Most citizens believed it would be a whitewash to introduce creationism into the syllabus.

I would say the reason that there is a controversy here is that we're independent thinkers and we're not going to be told "*This (evolution) is a factual event*" when there's not enough evi-

dence to back it up. “Independent thinkers?” Many of the people interviewed in the documentary show that their minds are firmly closed to evolution or any idea (with or without supporting evidence) that disagrees with their certainty about creationism.

They (the media) would portray Kansas and the people of the Midwest as hicks
The documentary shows that many Kansans are quite capable of doing that without media help.

Our children are confused enough without trying to bring in something that’s not real.
There’s that closed mind again.

Many scientists declined to attend the enquiry – they did not want to lend any credibility to Intelligent Design. This was taken as proof that they could not defend evolution.

Meanwhile the Intelligent Designers modified their doctrine from “*must be the result of...*” to “*to look for any evidence of the hand of the designer*”. If the modified wording was accepted it would open the doors to a change in the definition of Science in the State Teaching Standards.

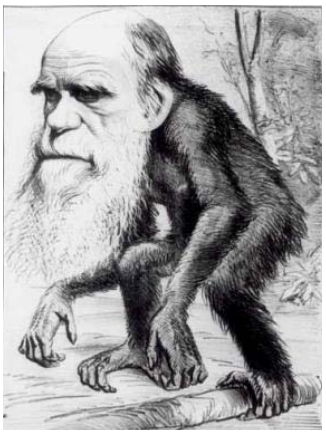
There is an incredible amount of data supporting Intelligent Design
Not if it can’t be tested – then it’s just superstition.

Evidence? Ask anybody !
Well, that’s convincing.

The attitude of the schoolchildren of various ages is interesting. Some who have left home and gone to college have changed their outlook now they are free of entrenched family and school beliefs and their interviews reflect this change. They comment on their religious upbringing at home and on teachers that proudly announced their belief in creationism, or derided evolution. Some have found in the less constricted atmosphere of college that they can reconcile their views on God and Science. Their parents, however, still refer to evolution teaching as ....indoctrinating our children with that atheistic view.

An experienced schoolteacher described teaching evolution to kids. She said their view was that evolution took away their belief that they were put on earth for a purpose. She got quite emotional about this. The response from a retired schoolteacher was that she should have learned to handle this years ago – she hadn’t done her job as a teacher.

A Moslem journalist described his countrymens’ feelings towards Americans as dislike because everything to an American was materialistic. His country was strongly involved in religion in daily life and had a different outlook.



Darwin as an Ape—a creationist portrayal

At a press conference one of the Board members paraphrased this as “*If you adopt intelligent design then fundamentalist Muslims won’t hate Americans as much*”.

Pedro Irigonegaray extracted from some scientific witnesses an admission that they had not actually read the draft standard. After he had criticized one witness over this, one of the committee members admitted she also had not read the draft. “*I thought that that was really irrelevant*”.

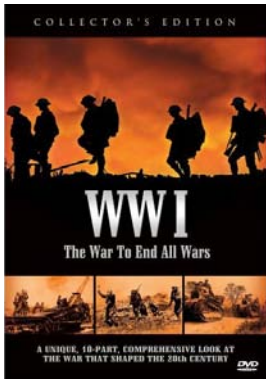
Irigonegeray’s response to this committeewoman was “*You have a responsibility to the children of this state, a responsibility that you have sadly failed*.” When faced with this sort of stupidity, he was turning increasingly aggressive.

In November 2006 the State School Board accepted the revised definition of science. This was reversed in early 2007 when moderates regained the majority on the Board and headed off a Supreme Court challenge.

In 2006 there were more than 47 challenges to evolution in 24 states. So far the Supreme Court has held fast and enforced the separation of church and state. So far many citizens have refused to accept any amount of evidence supporting evolution. In their blind ignorance they continue to be certain of creation and continue to try to force this view on others.

Rather surprisingly the film was selected for the Kansas International Film Festival, showing that there is still some common sense left in the state. It would be a good comedy documentary if it didn’t deal with such tragic bigoted people.

WW1 –
The War To End All Wars
2008
Creation Films
Reel DVD
R4 DVD



Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Opinions differ about the value of this sort of documentary. One side looks at them as "armchair history", not always well researched and often based more on available film footage than the importance of t he events being discussed. The other side (and I confess I am one of this group) does not have the time, expertise or references to explore the subjects in a more scholarly manner. DVDs like this fill the gap and provide sufficient information to raise interest and maybe inspire the viewer to do a little more research of their own.

How does this 3-DVD set measure up? It covers the buildup to the war, the political situation that caused it, the countries that were involved and the outcomes. The set has its weaknesses but we will look at those later. Its main strength is that it has enough capacity in 3 DVDs to explore the subject in a thorough manner.

There are hints that some of it has been taken from earlier shows. The interviews look around twenty years old or so and much of the action footage has been used before. It has been carefully assembled into a set of chapters that cover the progress of the war.

With Flags Waving

This chapter is the best and clearest explanation to the political lead-up to WW1 that I have seen. It starts with the growth in the strength of a combined Germany from Bismarck's time, and its attempts to marginalise its chief opposition on the continent, France. The complex web of alliances and treaties that eventually involved all countries in the war is explained well.

The Battle Of The Frontiers

The critical location of Belgium as a way around the fortifications of the German-French frontiers put it in danger from both the Germans and the French. Belgium's refusal to allow foreign troops to cross its borders led to its invasion. Both the French and the Germans simply ignored the little nation's protests in their rush to get at each others' throats. The valiant Belgian defence of Liege was to be one of their few battles.

The Germans took high casualties as they faced the well-prepared and entrenched Belgians, but the result was really never in doubt. The Germans had a new ground-penetrating shell that wrecked the walls and structures and allowed the German troops to take the Belgian forts. In the face of superior German firepower the old fort system was found to be outdated

France was not so easy. Although the German howitzers were superior against forts, the French had better field artillery in their 75mm fast-firing field gun. Unfortunately the French troops were inexperienced and less well-equipped. They fell back in the face of the sheer numbers of the Germans. Along the border the balance see-sawed. Von Moltke, the German leader, was less effective and indecisive. Joffre, the French commander, was overconfident and had ineffectual intelligence.

For a change the British got it right. Sir John French's British Expeditionary Force was at the right place at the right time, well-supplied and well prepared.

At Mons they were directly facing the bulk of the German army sweeping down through Belgium. Aerial reconnaissance soon made the French aware of this, but Sir John was unaware of its importance and had contra-intelligence that he preferred to believe. He dug in at Mons. Along the front the other countries did the same and the stage was set for the horrors of trench warfare. Interviews and quotes emotionally describe the dreadful experience of being underneath an accurate German heavy bombardment.

The Taxis of the Marne

This chapter discusses the French defence of their territory. It would take time to train and equip more men and gear up their industry to a wartime footing. The battle now was for supplies for the trench troops. Shells were rationed. Winter required warmer clothing, heating and constant clearing of roads and trenches. Any fighting soon became bogged down in the snow and the fight became one of artillery duels.

A War of Chemicals and Engineering

Chlorine gas was introduced at Ypres on an experimental basis. It caused a mass retreat of the affected French soldiers and opened up a five mile gap in the front.

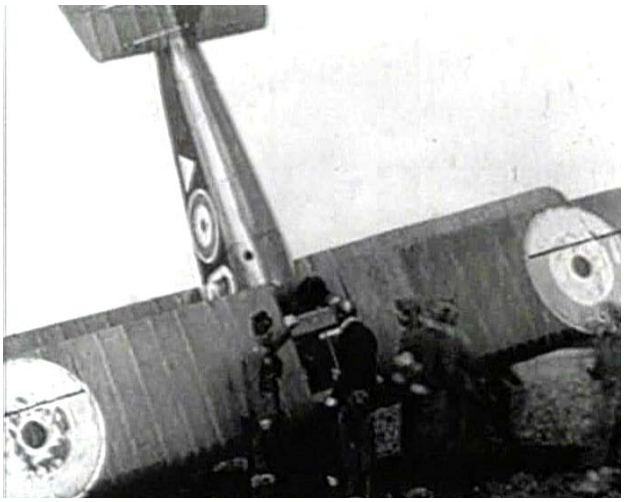
In the East the Russians Czarist troops were forcing the Austro-Hungarians back. The Germans took troops from the Eastern front and reinforced the Austrians. The Russians argued over priorities – keep attacking the Austro-Hungarians or concentrate on Germany? It was decided to keep attacking Germany, but Germany was better organised and industrialised. They wiped out much of the Russian army attacking Prussia. In the south, however, the Russians captured more than 100,000 Austrians. With plenty of shells and led once again by their powerful howitzer guns, the Austrian-German counterattack succeeded and the Russians were forced to withdraw to the Vistula river. The Czar ignored the rising dissatisfaction among his troops and the people.

When Germany and Bulgaria attacked Serbia, the King of Greece refused permission for the allies to land supporting troops and march them through Greece. Serbia's future was short.

On the Western front the Germans introduced flamethrowers. Losses in trench-based battles were now being counted in the hundreds of thousands.

Flyboys

Aerial warfare was a new development. There were significant intelligence gains from aerial reconnaissance and the military leaders to begin to take it seriously. Photography was a major development but the need to fly low and straight made the aircraft good targets for ground troops. Early bombing was developed. Both sides were aware of the difference reconnaissance and bombing could make to a battle



and it was inevitable that aircraft would be built to shoot down the other side's aircraft. This facet of the war has been better covered in the series Four Years of Thunder, but the coverage in this documentary is quite adequate.

Another little-covered area, German airships, is also explored. For a while they terrorised Londoners at night but they were vulnerable over the battlefield and could not carry a significant bombload. They had a brief use as a night bomber but the development of the night fighter made them a very dangerous proposition. They fell out of use, replaced by the twin-engined Gotha bomber.

Citadel

With the Central Powers now fighting on several fronts it was imperative to Germany that at least one of the fronts should be neutralised by a major military strike. Falkenheim, the German commander, believed the French army was at its lowest point and represented the best chance of success. If he could force France into submission it would make it difficult for the other allies to continue fighting on the Western Front. He saw Britain as his main enemy but could only step up submarine warfare against their supply lines. He proposed to stage a feint attack against the French troops at Verdun, forcing the French to counterattack. His well-protected troops would destroy the French troops and weaken their military power.

Rather than destroying the French in a counterattack, the initial German attack was quite successful in itself. The Germans halted within five miles of Verdun. At this point Petain was put in charge of the French defenses and readied a counterattack, as Falkenheim had anticipated. Not as planned, though, was the need for the Germans to attack the French guns which had

the Germans pinned down on the other side of the river. Attack after attack was driven back and was immediately followed by a French counterattack. It was the Germans who were being decimated in the battle. Joffre was not satisfied with this and replaced Petain with a more aggressive commander who had been nicknamed “the Butcher” because of his contempt for the lives of his men. Repeated attacks destroyed the reserves on both sides. Finally Falkenheim was directed to fight a defensive posture only. He was then replaced. In the final outcome both the German and French armies lost out and neither fully recovered before the end of the war.

Distant Fronts

The same need to open a new front to increase pressure on Germany and its allies was recognised by the British. The Dardanelles looked like a good prospect to Churchill as this would open up the Black Sea for supplies to Russia. The key point was the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey. 70,000 men were raised for the invasion – Australian, British, New Zealanders and French. Naval bombardments of the Turkish defences were dangerous as the Straits were sown with mines and the Turkish gunners were better than anticipated. Turkey also realised the importance of Gallipoli and strengthened the peninsula, while the British sorted out their supply problems in Egypt.

The landings were poorly managed. Where troops did get ashore they failed to press inland. The Australian and New Zealand troops (abbreviated to ANZAC) were pinned down at what became known as Anzac Cove. They were facing a very able Turkish commander, Mustafa Kemal. Occasional savage hand-to-hand fighting in brief raids became the standard of battle as the campaign bogged down. A new landing at Suvla Bay was also a failure when the troops again failed to move inland. Finally the attack was deemed a failure and the troops were evacuated.

Sea battles between the blockading British ships against the German Imperial Fleet were eagerly sought to establish control of the northern oceans. .The Kaiser was reluctant to send his prized navy to sea to face a possible battle loss. This chapter has a good analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two fleets, including their air support. The fleets finally met off Jutland but the battle was indecisive. The British lost more ships, but the Germans retreated to their ports and stayed there for the duration of the war.

Nationalist Arabs were concerned that the failing Ottoman Empire would not give them their freedom, so they allied themselves with Britain and France against the Turks. T. E. Lawrence was sent to help them build their own fighting force. The small force raised havoc, particularly with the railway system. They successfully tied down many Turkish troops and eventually controlled large amounts of territory in the eastern Mediterranean. The Ottomans tried to capture the critical Suez Canal. Two successive attacks failed, but many British troops were in turn tied down in the area. General Allenby was ordered to take Jerusalem. An Australian cavalry charge took Beersheba and broke the Ottoman defensive line, allowing them to move further and take Gaza. Gradually the allies moved up the coast until Jerusalem was finally taken. Further attacks drove the Turkish troops out of Palestine and the Turkish Government signed an Armistice, then surrendered.

Revolt

With the Russians believed to be incapable of launching a major assault in the west, German troops were moved to reinforce the eastern Front. The Russians saw their chance and attempted a massive attack to split the Germans and Austrians. At first it succeeded, but as reinforcements rushed back and the actions in the German part of the front petered out, the Russians were forced to retreat.

The constant losses, the poor conditions and the inept running of the war by the Czar were causing serious unrest in Russia. The 1916-1917 winter saw starvation and food shortages in Russian cities. Demonstrations began calling for a change of government. The Czar ordered his troops to shoot the mobs who were demon-

strating. The troops refused. Petrograd fell into the hands of the revolutionaries. The army began electing its own officers and ignoring the overall command of the Czar. Revolutionaries began touring the battlefronts, stirring up the soldiers.

The French army also had problems. By October 1917 more than 250 mutinies had occurred. The long-pressed troops were on the verge of revolt, and refused to take part in any more of the suicidal frontal assaults still favoured by their commanders. Petain was trusted by the troops and was brought back to regain control, but over 500 soldiers were executed for mutiny. At least they managed to get the doctrine of "victory at all costs" revoked. Another effect was that the British and Dominion forces took a greater share of the fighting.

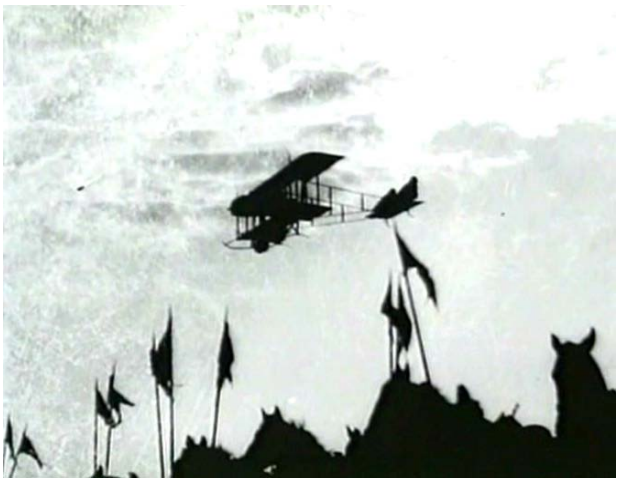
In Russia Lenin's Bolsheviks, with the Army on their side, finally staged a coup that toppled the government. They then set out to arrange an Armistice with the Germans. The armistice cost Russia a third of its agricultural land and much of its population. Germany gained thousands of free troops to send to the Western front.

To relieve pressure on the French and deny Belgian ports to the German U-boats, Haig was ordered to launch an attack into Belgium. It was to be another "attack at all costs" assault so beloved by the homicidal Haig. Despite their inferior artillery, faulty shells, and rainy conditions that made tanks unusable the attack continued and predictably bogged down. The reinforced, well-dug-in Germans also used a new weapon – mustard gas. The horror of Passchendaele began. Over three months of fighting, half a million soldiers died.

Finally at Cambrai the British got it together. They organised their tanks in massed groups, working over ground that had not been churned into mud by preliminary shelling. Tank and infantry cooperation were essential. Air support was laid on. Unfortunately the advance faltered and eventually the British withdrew back to their previous lines, wasting thousands of lives in the process.

Changing Tide

This chapter explores the political situation in the United States. There was some British sympathy and some distrust of Germany, but no overwhelming will to fight. This attitude changed with the sinking of the Lusitania in



1915 by a submarine. Many Americans lost their lives. President Wilson was forced to respond and threatened to break off diplomatic relations with Germany. A German message urging Mexico to attack the US, supported by Germany, was intercepted and the tide of public opinion swung. Finally when US ships were sunk in a convoy, America joined the war. By June 1918 their troops were moving to Europe. This led to unrestricted submarine warfare by the Germans in a desperate attempt to stop the flow of materiel and men.

The U-boat war and its increasing effectiveness is described in great detail. The convoy system was developed as a defence against the submarines. Depth charges started to achieve success.

Austrians, supplemented by German troops, attacked Italy at Caporetto. The primary attack was highly successful but the subsidiary attacks were held off by the Italians. Allied aid now flowed to Italy and eventually the Italians broke the demoralised Austrian forces. Further aid to the area led to Serbia being liberated and Bulgaria pulling out of the war. Germany's allies were gradually dropping out as the war contracted.

End Game

The leaders of the German forces were coming to the view that they must stage a huge decisive battle to break the allies, or capitulate. The battle was set for northeastern France along a huge front, and over a million German troops participated. Allied troops were seriously outnumbered and were forced back. The allies regrouped and by early April 1918 it was obvious that the huge attack had failed. The Germans were now low on manpower and supplies and facing the fresh American troops. French coun-

terattacks pushed the Germans back towards the Rhine and U.S. reinforcements were brought in to support the French.

In Russia the fall of the Czar led to a number of areas like Finland defecting and becoming independent. Internal problems – the hatred and disorganisation between the Reds and Whites - led them to look inwards and other countries took advantage to capture Russian territory from the Germans for themselves.

In Germany the army was becoming increasingly unhappy with its leadership. Its army's strength had now fallen by twenty percent. Small groups of soldiers were surrendering to the allies rather than keep fighting. When the Austrians advised Germany that they would negotiate a separate peace, Prince Wilhelm finally realised that the war must finish. A new German government was formed, which contacted the allies to arrange an armistice. Ludendorff, head of the army, was in favour of fighting on to the last man but was forced to resign. Wilhelm's wish for a last gesture sea battle as a matter of honour brought the navy to mutiny. The revolt quickly spread to the rest of the navy, then to the workers.

On November 8 the armistice was signed – by the civilian government. Not a single German officer signed. Perhaps the most disappointed was the American general Pershing who wanted to carry the fight into Germany, reasoning that the Germans must know they had been beaten.

Now let's look at the weaknesses of the DVDs.

As you would expect from such a massive documentary some of the footage is reused in a number of sections, but the amount of newer footage and the use of stills is outstanding.

There are few interviews and they are not used for padding but to illustrate a point. As noted, they seem to be from older documentaries but this is understandable – there are few survivors of the war left. Often their written words are voiced and the American accent creeps in to some of these. The U.S. pronunciations are a little strange – "admirality" for "Admiralty" is a regular and grating example.

I would like to have seen an attempt to clean up some of the footage. The technology exists, but not using it gives parts of the series a rather low -budget look.

The background music is mostly classical and is a bit sporadic about how well it fits the context. The music played during the credits is dreadfully out of place – Dixieland jazz is simply not appropriate for such a grim subject.

Comparisons with *The World At War*, the magnificent series covering World War 2, are unavoidable. Although The World At War seems much better produced, this series, because of its detailed and thorough content seems to me to be quite a good effort.

I especially make allowances for the time differences – The World At War was made about thirty years after the event, while many of the participants were still living and there was much more film footage available. This set covers a war thirty years older again.

Overall it's a good job of a complex subject and I commend it to you.

Kristin Tercek is an artist who is well known for her plush toys which were sold via her online store Cuddly Rigor Mortis. However, after many years of the making the same items over and over again she has branched out into prints and we are very glad she did.

Kristin started painting when she was 12 and had been doing so ever since, she went to NYU Film School where she explored animation. This is where she met her husband Ed Mironiuk whose fetish art is well respected (we will be running a piece on him as well). Together they run an ink and paint business and Kristin produces these prints as a creative outlet.

Kristin offers both originals (acrylic on wood) and high quality prints. The reproductions are Giclée prints, printed on pH neutral, cotton satin rag fine art paper by Hahnemuhle using an Epson 9800 and colourfast pigment inks from the K3 inkset at 1440 dpi. These prints are rated stable for greater than 100 years. Each comes with a certificate of authenticity and is numbered.

Kristin's art is a quirky mix of the sweet and the dark, the combination of nice and nasty creates a unique bite. For example in *Sweet Lobotomy* (2009) we have a very cute little watermelon man but he certainly looks a bit maudlin, not surprising really, since you want a slice of melon, he has carefully removed a section of his head and left it on the floor just for you !

In *Bomb Boy* (2004) we have the same cuteness but with a darker edge. He has large wide eyes, a big shiny black head and a look of apprehension on his face, perhaps he knows what is coming.

He has a match in his hand and a lit wick on his head, his fate is all too obvious. This display of innocent beauty at the edge of oblivion is both enticing and slightly uncomfortable.

Dancing Persephone (2009) is a more complex work. In Greek mythology Persephone is both the embodiment of fertility and the Queen of the underworld. Here she is shown as a innocent dancing child in a ballerina dress. She has one eye closed (with an X) symbolic of her underworld status and one eye wide open. Her crown is dressed with skulls.

She dances on two pomegranates, one of which is cut right through. In my mind the extreme redness of the fruit reminds me of meat and flesh, but maybe that's just me. The earth below is a green colour but also reminiscent of the globe of the earth. She has rather pretty dark hair tied off in two bows.

Tercek's art is simple yet complex; it uses childlike images which are innocent, coy and cute and yet portray the dark and at times brutal side of life. She has an excellent grasp of symbolism and uses it to her advantage. I find her art fascinating and poignant. The prints look beautiful when framed and yet are very reasonable in cost.

Kirstin has an incredibly wide and diverse selection of art available, these can be seen on both her website and on her Flickr page.

Cuddly Rigor Mortis
Web: http://shop.cuddlyrigormortis.com

Ed Mironiuk is one of a small number of truly great fetish artists. There are lots of graphic artists creating images of woman, many in alluring poses, but Ed's make you truly stand at attention! His images have a sense of startling realism that is quite breathtaking. The texture he is able to give latex and leather is not found in many works of similar character and the way he combines both eroticism with a sense of play is truly masterful.

Mironiuk has had a long career working for Genitorturers, Marquis, Secret, Equus Eroticus, Frontiers Newsmagazine and Tattoo Magazine to name a few but his inspiration certainly hasn't dried up yet. *The Art of Ed Mironiuk* (SQP 2009) is a stunning portfolio of his work. It offers stunning lifelike images expressing all manner of carnal and fetishistic desire from schoolgirls with knives to crucified woman, from corsets to tattoos, angels to devils, sweet and nice to downright nasty. It is a superb collection reproduced in the highest colour quality; the images literally leap off the page. Some are hilarious, I love Mary from Hooters at the Manger; others are just seriously hot, others still have a real bite with knives and blades and blood on the floor.

His unique combination of fetish, tattoos, Japanese cultural images, low brow art, religious iconography and a great sense of humour makes his work beautiful and entertaining.

For example, *Kali-Persephone,* his image of Kali, the Hindu Goddess of lust and death mixed together with Persephone is a joy to behold. Sex and death transformed into a fetish image with a beautiful blue Kali, a beheaded lover, an erotically awakened submissive (with her sexual/snake awakened) and lots of skulls and arms hanging from her waist.

Catholicism is every more evocative. Since I love Nunsploitation this image grabbed me as soon as I saw it ! A nun riding a latex, masked submissive using the tube from the front of her gas mask as a guide and her fork tail to stimulate her naked lower regions. The submissive has superb horned headgear and a beautiful willowing red cloak.

There are so many of his works that are both gorgeous and astonishing and since they are available in various sizes there is no reason not to get yourself some copies of your favourite images. The quality is superb and they would look marvellous framed.

His work is available at a good price from various locations online.

The book and some nice prints can be had from **Big Cartel** (http://edmironiuk.bigcartel.com/). While there is also some seriously cool stuff available from **Cafe Press** (http://www.cafepress.com/edmironiuk/4673018) and other services linked from his website.

Ed is also available for commissions and is able to truly capture the essence of the carnal life, visit his website for more information.

I Am Plastic: The Designer Toy Explosion
Paul Budnitz
Harry N. Abrams, Inc 2006

Reviewer: Michelle Taylor

This wonderful book is a visual exploration of the designer toy phenomenon. Starting in Hong Kong and Japan in the latter half of the 1990s, the movement has since spread around the world like wildfire, with artists working in Asia, Europe, North America and Australia. Artists and designers from various creative backgrounds have all contributed to this fresh and exiting contemporary art movement; from comic book artists and underground illustrators to graffiti artists and those with a background in the so called fine arts, it is indeed a diverse and vibrant phenomenon.

Coming in two basic forms; vinyl figures and plush toys, a bewildering variety of objects have been created that cater for all tastes... wood, resin, metal, cloth and latex designer toys are also occasionally made. On first glance many people would assume that they are just silly toys, but the closer one looks, the more one starts to appreciate that they are truly unique artistic creations; so don't let the fact that they are colourful, stylized and plastic fool you! Made in relatively small numbers of anywhere between as few as 10 and as many as 2000; they are highly sought after by the serious collector, and quickly become rare and desirable objects.

Many designer toys also come in a selection of different colourways; also of limited runs of anywhere between 20 and 500 at most, and vinyl figures can also come in a wide range of shapes and sizes with some as small as 2 inches and others as large as 12 inches. For me vinyl figures especially appeal to my artistic sensibilities with their playful sculptural quality; and very postmodern sense of aesthetics, I also really love the fact that they blur the line between what is traditionally considered highbrow and lowbrow art. Many designer toys play on the cute factor; but also have a darker edge, and others still challenge ones sense of what is considered to be beautiful or tasteful. Most of the toys are given a detailed back story and history that adds to their appeal; and in many instances there will be a related cast of characters as well, or slightly different versions of the same character. Although none are included in this book; three such examples are the two Scavenger Series by Kathie Olivas, Dave Pressler's two WWII inspired German and Soviet Angry Clobber Monkey's and Andrew Bell's confronting and pessimistic The Giver of War and The Giver of Disease. An example that is included in this book is the Minitreehouse Series; created by the brilliant Australian artist Nathan Jurevicius, who is now based in Toronto Canada.

After more than a decade now the designer toy movement is still going as strong as ever; with more and more artists creating their own distinctive vinyl figures or plushies, which will make fans and aficionados very happy indeed! My only fear is that large entertainment corporations might cotton on and try to muscle in on this phenomenon; and thus squeeze out the independent artists that have made this vibrant movement what it is today, but hopefully that is an unlikely scenario. Another name for designer toys, and vinyl figures in particular is urban vinyl, a term that arises from the fact that many artists are inspired by hip hop culture and that most of these artists, and most of the people who collect their creations are trendy urbanites. Paul Budnitz's wonderfully cool book covers the work of many artists from all over the globe right up until the date of its publication (2006) there is also a short introduction in the first few pages that succinctly explains what designer toys are all about; and the rest of the book is taken up by a dazzling full colour portfolio that is categorized by region, and then by artist or company. The details of each artist or maker are included on the top left hand corner of every few pages, that provides important info and even websites. I also hope that at some future date a revised and expanded edition will be published; or even better an *I Am Plastic* Volume Two, especially considering how many new toys have been made in the intervening years.

I Am Plastic: The Designer Toy Explosion is an amazing visual exploration of the designer toy phenomenon that will be valued for many years to come by collectors and artists alike; so if you are hip enough to appreciate the aesthetics of this postmodernist art form, this sumptuous coffee table book should definitely be on your wishlist.

ScaryGirl
Nathan Jurevicius

Nathan Jurevicius was born in Australia in 1973 to an Australian mother and Lithuanian-Latvian father. Growing up in a family of artists; he held his first exhibition at the age of six and made a conscious decision at 14 to pursue an artistic career. He graduated in 1995 with a degree in design and illustration from the University of South Australia.

His first big break came when asked to illustrated children's books while at university and this led to his freelance career as an editorial artist and illustrator, all the while simultaneously working on personal projects. In 2002, the Hong Kong based company "Flying Cat" approached him to collaborate on creating unique and unusual designer toys, so he decided to take his designs to the next level.

Since then he has become a world-renowned artist, illustrator, toy designer and storyteller. While he is best known for his Scary Girl comics and products, he has also produced a wide

range of other designer figures which have become in demand with collectors. Nathan is still a big kid at heart and has an imaginary friend, Andrew, who he's been with since pre-school !

Scarygirl is Nathan's major project, she is a strange little lady, slightly odd and a deformed, she lives in a psychedelic, folklore-inspired world with a giant octopus guardian and other bizarre characters such as a rabbit guru and a secretive scientist. She spends her life searching for her identity with the help of her friends.

She has taken the world by storm with toys, an online game (http://www.scarygirl.com) and an upcoming animated film. The online game has created a real buzz and offers a superbly interactive experience of Scarygirl's world. It was created with the help of Passion Pictures Australia and financial assistance from the Film Victoria Digital Media Fund and through it Nathan, and a team of dedicated professionals have brought the world of Scarygirl to life.

The new Minitreehouse series (StrangeCo) offers incredibly detailed and elaborate vinyl figures which are based on his original Minitreehouse figures (which were small in size).

The series features designs which are the characters of the Minitreehouse which makes up the microcosmos of the Scarygirl world, a bit like bugs or birds around your own house.

Apart from a visit by Scary Girl herself, they're mostly unnoticed by the larger characters. Nonetheless, these new personalities all have their own stories, interests and eccentricities.

Recently the Minitreehouse has been renamed “Dudson’s Modern Tales” and has developed into a spin off from Scarygirl and will include its own animated feature. It has been advertised through 90 15 second trailers created for the Toronto Subways. You can see some of the film clips at http://dudson.tv/

Arkski is the fourth release in the series and comes in two different configurations, Super Mom and Sky Navigator.

Arkski - Super Mom (Pink)

Arkski has a packed schedule. She is a full-time mother of two high-energy kids (including a mischievous toddler), and is a part-time ruler of a small country.

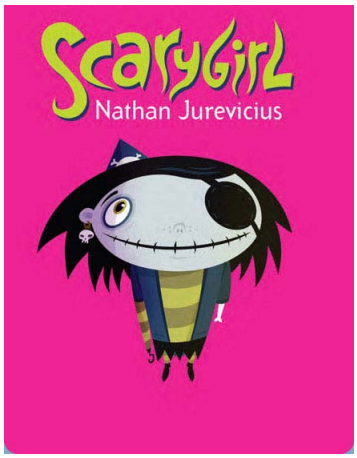
As Super Mom, she's equipped with an all-purpose backpack and dressy necklace.

Arkski in Pink is packaged in Super Mom mode, with backpack, necklace and mischievous toddler.

Arkski - Sky Navigator (Magenta)

Arkski might be busy but in her precious few down time moments, she likes to navigate the skies complete with compass, angel wings and a custom-designed sturdy helmet.

Arkski in Magenta is packaged in Sky Navigator mode, with compass, angel wings and custom designed sturdy helmet.



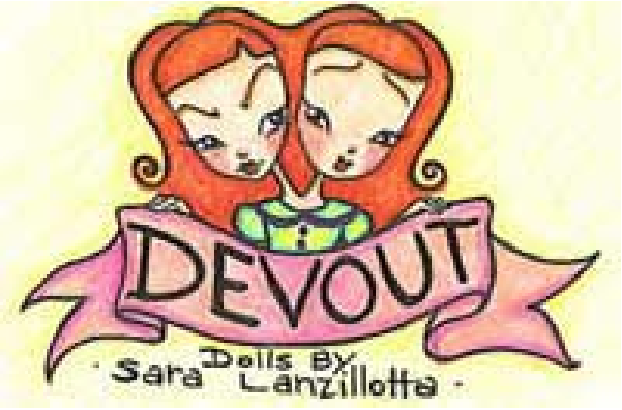
The graphic novel of Scarygirl was released in October 2009. This beautiful collector's book with a fold-out jacket which becomes a poster, contains the first adventures of Scarygirl ever collected in book form and also includes an interview with Nathan.

Abandoned on a remote beach, Scarygirl doesn't know who she is or where she's come from.

Blister, a kind and intelligent giant octopus, wants to keep her safe, but Scarygirl needs answers. Who is the strange man haunting her dreams? Will Bunniguru help her unlock the mysteries of her past? Can she trust the wily forest dwellers? Her journey takes her to the edge, and beyond...

Arkski and other Nathan Jurevicius products are distributed in Australia by Scary Toys who also have a superb range of other toys and collectibles.

Web: http://www.scarytoys.com.au/



Web: http://www.devoutdolls.com/

For the past 12 years, Sara Lanzillotta has been using sewing as art; creating dolls, odd creatures, and sculptural anomalies entirely out of fabric. She uses traditional forms of sewing and doll-making being influenced by her doll maker mother. Sara's work is cute and approachable yet at the same time mixed with confusing and sometimes disturbing elements. A perfect mix of sweet and scary, Sara's work often makes us question traditional ideals in society and makes us laugh when faced with the alternative. Her work has been showcased in many galleries across the country and at the Seattle Art Museum.

Sara started many years ago, making goofy monsters that made noise and some very simple dolls with extra heads, arms and legs. She received such a great reaction, it encouraged her to take it a step further and create a business. Over the years she experimented with different pattern techniques and different designs. She loves working with fabric and creating something 3-dimensional of a once flat piece of fabric. It's really exciting to see the finished product come together in the end. She has been making plush, dolls and soft sculptures now for

12 years, non-stop, and have really enjoyed the journey. She has an on-going theme with the two heads. She is so totally obsessed, if something only has one head, it actually looks abnormal! She wanted to make something "cute" that also has something "wrong" with it. The "Squeakums" came about from Sara wanting to do a simplified version of her more structured monsters. Something less expensive that everyone could enjoy that would still capture the creepy cuteness. She thinks of them as little freak pets for people. Who doesn't want a two-headed cat, right? All of her earlier monsters always made noise as well so she wanted to add that element to these guys too with a "squeaker" inside their tummies, hence the name "Squeakums".

The Squeakums are fun, strange and quirky. They combine the innocence of a beautifully made plush toy with an element of the weird and strange. The cat with two heads is both very loveable and a little creepy, marvellous !

The Octobabies are a fun idea, they have wobbly legs with wire inside them so you can wrap their legs around things or have them hold things. Playability is really important to Sara so having the extra element like being able to pose them seemed a logical idea. Again she added the freak element by combining animals and making octupus-animal hybrids.

Hearing about the Octobabies I wondered just how you would make such wonders. They are truly delightful, the legs are carefully made and are attached securely. They are such weird little blighters and come in all sorts of colours !

Sara also produces a range of other plush items including Mermaids, Mini Pins (mini stuffed animals), Tinies (small dolls), dolls clothes and forest friends, sweet deformed deers !

Rob Meyer
Web: http://www.icftb.etsy.com

Zombiez! have infected fans all over the world!

Zombiez are handpainted, one-of-a-kind art figures. Each figure features unique character design and paint application.

Many of the figures also feature soft goods and sculpted accessories. Each Zombie comes with a hand-signed and numbered blister card.

Rob Meyer has done an amazing job creating a unique collectible Zombie action figure. He even takes custom orders where you can have him make your design or better still, a Zombie in your own likeness !

Evil Ice Creams
Web: http://evilicecream.com

Ice Creams are devious little buggers. They seem so cute, so friendly; but if you drop one they turn evil. With their ice cream on the bottom and a cone or stick on the top, they are naughty and maybe even dangerous

touch, they are 8” tall. There are also little Evil Ice Cream figures which are made of polystone and are 2.5” tall. Also available are Evil Ice Cream buttons.

The website includes some extra funstuff including comics, horoscopes, Ice Cream conspiracies and more !

The Sacrifice
Yamato USA
Web: http://www.yamatotoysusa.com

Yamato makes truly amazing items. Their fantasy series is unique in presenting works by major Asian fantasy artists rendered as collectible resin figures. The detail on each figure in he series is superb and the sheer presence they create is astounding. At the same time they are very reasonably priced.

The Sacrifice is the third in the series and by Dorian Cleavenger, who is well respected fantasy artist with an eye for the exotic and the erotic. His personal website is also worth looking at: http://dorianart.com/

Dorian considers his art to be “pseudo-realism” as he mixes photo realistic imagery with fantasy elements. This is clearly evident in The Sacrifice where the main figure is astonishing real but placed in a dreamlike fantasy setting.

She offers herself to her deity, her lover and her soulmate.
She is pure and true, unembellished by the ravages of society.
She is life… she is the ultimate sacrifice.

She can be yours. Presenting the third piece in Yamato USA's awe-inspiring fantasy collection, Fantasy Figure Gallery: The Sacrifice (Dorian Cleavenger).

Yamato USA's Fantasy Figure Gallery is a groundbreaking collection of resin quality PVC statues, bringing together the unrivalled talent of Asia's foremost portrait sculptors with the leading fantasy artists of Europe and the Americas.

Featured here, "The Sacrifice" by Dorian Cleavenger as envisioned by Plant-jzero Moekichi.

Brought to three dimensional life, Dorian Cleavenger's "The Sacrifice" stands nearly 13.00 inches including an elaborately detailed altar base and removable parts.

Dorian has also recently completed his first feature length film "*Reunion*".

Written, produced, filmed, edited and directed by Dorian, it was acted using family and friends as characters and produced on a very tight budget, but which throughout shows his exquisite composition and flair for artistic and imaginary expression within such budgetary constraints while weaving a complex scenario with interesting highlights and a surprisingly unusual outcome to a complex familial interrelationship.

For another Dorian figure see the beautiful and alluring Akira also available from Yamato USA in various formats.

The image by Dorian has been envisioned by Plant-jzero Moekichi and created as a very lifelike three dimensional figure.

It stands some 13.00" tall and is a showstopper of an item ! It includes an elaborately detailed altar base and removable parts. Accessories include cast-off clothing and an altar display base.

Dorians Website: http://dorianart.com/
Yamato: http://www.yamatotoysusa.com

Qee Collection
Toy2r
Web: http://www.toy2r.com

Qee, pronounced as 'key', is a registered design from Hong Kong, created by the founder Toy2r, Raymond Choy. Qee was introduced in 2002 causing lots of excitement amongst toy collectors worldwide, soon after caught it caught the imagination of art lovers and graphic designers and become quite a craze. Toy2r has eighteen Qee base characters

to date and these mini figures stand 2.5 inches tall. They are used as both a fashionable accessory (keychain) and/or designer/art toy collectable.

This combination of accessory and collector toy makes them quite unusual. They come in 'blind' boxes to conceal their identities to add excitement to the collecting process. You never know what figure you will get and if you find that you have duplicates you could always work a trade.

The base characters include: BearBearQ, KitCatQ, DoGgyQ, ToyerQ, MonQ, BuneeQ, PigeeQ, EggQ, BalleeQ, BoxeeQ, EarggQ, SprayeeQ, CupeeQ GrizeeQ, PungeeQ, ElepeeQ, Boxee ToyerQ and RhineeQ.

All of the Qee figures are designed by renowned designers/artists from across the globe. They are available in various sizes that include the 1.5", 2.5", 8", 16", 36" and the 60" Qee.

Toy2r also provides Do It Yourself Qees for aspiring designers and artists who wish to use Qee as a 3D canvas to express their own original work.

There are so many variations to the Qee which make them especially fun to collect. The Reservoir Dogs Qee are certainly cool in a dark sort of way, while the Wood Grain Qee are just sort of au natural.

There is the seriously demented Target Dog Employee Qee and lots of animal Qee. Qee are an innovative and interesting collectible range which offer a combination of innovation and creativity with lots of flexibility. The large Qee are real collector items and certainly make their presence felt.

CrazyAL STORE

"Tiki is about escapism. I was this kid from Scottsdale who wanted nothing more than to run around in the jungle with Tarzan. It is the search for nirvana, a comfort zone. I feel Tiki will never die. People are very nostalgic. As long as there's ocean breezes blowing and waves crashing on a group of islands called Hawaii, there will be Tiki!"
Crazy Al in Tiki Magazine, 2006

The term Tiki refers to large wood and stone carvings of humanoid forms in Central Eastern Polynesian cultures of the Pacific Ocean. The term is also used as it relates to Polynesian mythology where Tiki is the first man. The development of Tiki culture in the U.S. began in 1934 with the opening of Don the Beachcomber, a Polynesian-themed bar and restaurant in Hollywood. Three years later, Victor Bergeron, better known as Trader Vic, adopted a Tiki theme for his restaurant in Oakland, which eventually grew to become a worldwide food chain.

However, many argue that the real Tiki revolution began when American soldiers returned from World War II and brought with them tall tales of the South Pacific, Tiki gifts and garish shirts.

11" Custom Tiki

CrazyAL Evans Tiki Lantern Ceramic Mug

Soon this combined with the music of artists such as Les Baxter, Arthur Lyman, and Martin Denny who created a form of early world music centred on tropical and exotic beats. In the 1990's came a revival of retro forms and lounge music which also brought a revival of interest in Tiki culture including books, music, restaurants, magazines (such as Tiki Magazine http://www.tikimagazine.com) and clubs.

Crazy Al produces a wide range of Tiki items including Tikis, mugs and related items. In 1996, a friend commissioned Al to carve his first large Tiki sculptures and hence Crazy AL's Bone Productions began and has flourished ever since.

Crazy Al produces everything from highly intricate commissioned custom Tikis on which he can spend thirty hours to Door Nobs and lightswitches, limited edition Chess sets, limited edition Tikis, T-Shirts, magnets, Tiki Mugs, incense holders, cocktail glasses, candle holders and lots more.

Web: http://www.tikimania.com/

CUPCO

Cupco is the design, animation, illustration and doll-making brainchild of Lucas Temby and his wife Mayumi Temby. Born on the streets of Tokyo on skateboards and mass sticker pasting, and subsequently transplanted to Sydney, Australia, Cupco! both appreciates and satirises the ludicrous and ridiculous nature of modern society.

Cupco produces surprising, amusing and sometimes outrageous items from plus dolls to stickers, explosive key rings to all manner of strangeness.

Cupco has moved into the world of mass production and is proud to introduce the Cupco *Bomber Girl Keyring*. If you want to make a comment about the stupidity of suicide bombers, this is the way to do it ! Put some explosive in your pants!!! Comes with free stickers!

Cupco plush items are beautifully made with removable swappable heads and all sorts of nice little touches . For example, the *Fear Demons*, which have already sold out, have removable helmets, detachable heads and hand-printed backs.

The *Gaza Kids Child Soldier Dolls* are politically powerful messages as well as lots of fun, they have removable heads (they can be exchanged with other Cupco plush, do buy more and create your own modded dolls), wrap around scarves, messages on their chests and on their backs.

Cupco also creates rare larger dolls, for example, *The Suicide Bomber Boy* is a truly outrageous anti-war classic! It even comes with a removable bomb vest. It is 18' inches and 10' wide, a startling doll to say the least.

You can also feel the power of *Mara, the Snake Goddess.* She is the spirit of illusion and darkness. Here is a plush which will help you commune with all your basest instincts and seduce you into the darkest realms of human decrepitude!! She even has her tits out ! Super slimy and scaly snake worship backprint! She even has four snake heads and four arms.

She is a wonder of evil and 100% hand-made one-of-kind uniqueness! Features detachable head so you can buy other Cupco dolls and swap the heads for more fun! This doll is 16 cm W (6.5") x 35 cm H (14")

Cupco has some truly amazing items, quirky, dark, funny and iconoclastic. They are superbly made and pack a bite as both collectible plush and social commentaries ! Remember that Cupco items are in limited supply, so visit the website and place an order quick !

Web: http://www.cupco.net

KILLA INSTINCT

Killa Instinct is designed by well known street artist Marka27.

He has made quite a name for himself with his line of unique vinyl toy speakers, Minigods, which combine a unique street aesthetic with workable speakers.

These 16” beauties have been inspired by African, Asian, South and Central American ancient art and culture.

Killa Instinct has been transformed by toxic spray paint fumes into something truly amazing. This mutated graffiti artist is ready for action with tools of the trade – a bad-ass removable gas mask, spray can, marker, bolt cutters, brass knuckles, and more.

Graffiti art is so much part of Killa’s nature that he has a spray can erupting out of his back. The spray can which fuels his artistic endeavours directly through his gas mask also doubles as a secret stash with a removable top – for markers, extra cans and other goodies.

Killa Instinct comes in different forms. The Blok-hedz edition is sold out (100pcs) but had a baseball bat, GID (glow in the dark) and came with a gas mask, markers, spray cans etc.

Killa Instinct stands 10“ tall and is about 6.5“ wide, he has 6 points of articulation -shoulders, wrists, head and waist. He is very lifelike; the trousers, shoes posture are like a real Graffiti artist, the section where the can erupts out of his back is very realistic.

The can on his back has a lid which can be opened hiding sets of spray cans and marker pens; these are carefully wrapped so they won’t be scratched in transit.

He has a set of brass knuckles which say Kill and Toys. He also comes with a set of bolt cutters; these come separately wrapped and are then positioned in his right hand.

He looks very cool in his gas mask with a well developed face underneath, he is really quite a startling work of urban vinyl and an outstanding example of what can be achieved.

Killa Instinct is designed by Marka27 and manufactured by BIC plastics. Since Killa Instinct has a low run of 300 pieces, I suggest you get in quick !

An efficient, friendly and reliable online outlet which has him in stock is Wizard Sleeve Toys (http://www.wizardsleevetoys.com/)

Mad (Jeremy Madl) has been professionally illustrating and designing toys for over thirteen years. Over his career he has worked with clients such as Kidrobot, Mattel, YUM Brands, Pepsi, Scion, Wild Planet, NFL, Upper Deck, Playmates Toys, Makita and IDT Entertainment on a variety of today's hottest and largest brands, collaborating on many projects ranging from promotions to packaging, character design to retail and premium toys.

Aside from his own commercial projects, he has worked non-stop on his own licensed toy lines and brands under the MAD Toy Design label for the past 7 years. His first production figure line called the MAD*L™ has been one of the hottest brands on the market since it first released in 2004 and continues to fly off the shelves globally with each new release. Jeremy tries to keep a full arsenal of new products in development at all times... ranging from toys, tee's, prints, and more.

It is difficult to justice to the wide range of amazing items available from Mad, so we will choose and a few to introduce him to you.

Slam Madl is an amazing fellow. He is 5" tall and comes in a rather nice spot UV box with a custom sticker.

He looks very cool with his eye rings, tattoo on his chest and trendy gear. He is part of the Phase:3 set which consists of *Armybot*, *Slam* and *Aidamon*. *Armybot* is also quite superb with army greens, a star on his chest, he is certainly ready for action.

There are many different toys within the various Phases of the MAD*L range.

The Dolbee Compact Characters are rather fun adaptations of the old cassette tape into a true collectible toy. It is 5" tall ABC plastic and was designed by Mad for the ATP festival being manufactured by Solid. A very special and hard to get model is the *Glow in the Dark Dolbee* (*Madness*).

Headphonies are a unique take on speakers for music players, they are 3.5" and manufactured by Headphonies. *Headphonies* brings together the art scene, music scene, and everything fun in between. These ultra-portable designer speakers feature thematic characters by various artists. Each one has a unique personality and attitude, but they all pump out the same amazing audio. They are charged by your music device) and then play with surprisingly good sound for four hours per one hour of charging. Madl designed a number of *Headphonies* including Ape, Modern Hero and Ninja.

Madl has also collaborated on the *Dunny* series by Kidrobot. This is a series of 3" blind box mini figures. The Madl figures in series four are *Modern Hero* and *Mad Agent*. There are also the 8" Mad Dunny figures called *Mad Ninja's* in three colourways: Red, White and Black.

Madl has also collaborated on many unique items such as *Sham Da Clown* manufactured by Bic Plastics. An amazing item only available in a very limited run (red/white 300pcs and black and gold 96 pcs), it is joyful yet quirky celebration of the clown.

Why not visit Mad's website and see what else he is working on or better still keep an eye on his blog.

Mad Toy Design
Web: http://www.madtoydesign.com/

Idle Hands
Dylan Sisson
Web: http://www.dylansisson.com
Retail: http://www.wizardsleevetoys.com

"As an artist if I can create ambiguity, perhaps with a creature where it's unclear whether it will eat you or follow you home, then it creates an interesting tension ..."
Dylan Sisson

Dylan Sisson was raised in Washougal in Washington State. He left Washougal to study typography, printmaking and comic books. He currently resides in San Francisco, where he draws and paints wide-eyed curiosities with big teeth. Dylan finds inspiration for his art while doodling on receipts, napkins and bar coasters and his projects have ranged from the book arts to animation to painting. His independent animations have been screened in festivals around the world. His forays into painting have led to various gallery showings peppered along the west coast. Invariably, the subjects chosen by Sisson are those things that are at once compelling and repugnant, they are beautiful and yet confronting, creepy and very cute.

His website includes extensive galleries of paintings, drawings and animations. However, the most exciting development is "Idle Hands" which is showcased at www.creepy-cute.com

This is a superb collectible, ever so cute but very creepy and disconcerting. His name, of course, celebrates the phrase "idle hands make the devil's work" and he greatly reminds me of the lesser demons of books of Medieval demonology or even the imaginary animals of Bestiaries. I always had a fascination with the grimoires and spellbooks of the Medieval period ranging from the Lesser Key of Solomon to "The Magus". Idle Hands has that strange sense of innocence mixed with malevolence that would be at home in any Medieval Bestiary or spell-book.

Baker's Dozen © Dylan Sisson

Idle Hands stands 10" high and is truly startling. His skin is textured to touch, his eyes are wide to see you wherever you go and his belly is nice and large (a lot like mine). He has articulated arms and comes in a very cool presentation box with a maze on the top. There are five hundred in the release, 300 orange, 100 pink and 100 monochrome.

Each one comes with a numbered coaster of authenticity. He even has his own theme song ! (http://www.dylansisson.com/creepy-cute/song.html).

Idle Hands is a truly awesome rogue; beautiful, creepy, cute; you want to hold him but just aren't sure he won't bite.

A friendly, reliable and efficient online retail outlet which has him in stock is Wizard Sleeve Toys (http://www.wizardsleevetoys.com)

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UPCOMING RELEASES:
DUNNY SERIES 2009- 10 September
SCARYGIRL: The Original Graphic Novel by Nathan Jurevicius- 01 October

www.scarytoys.com.au
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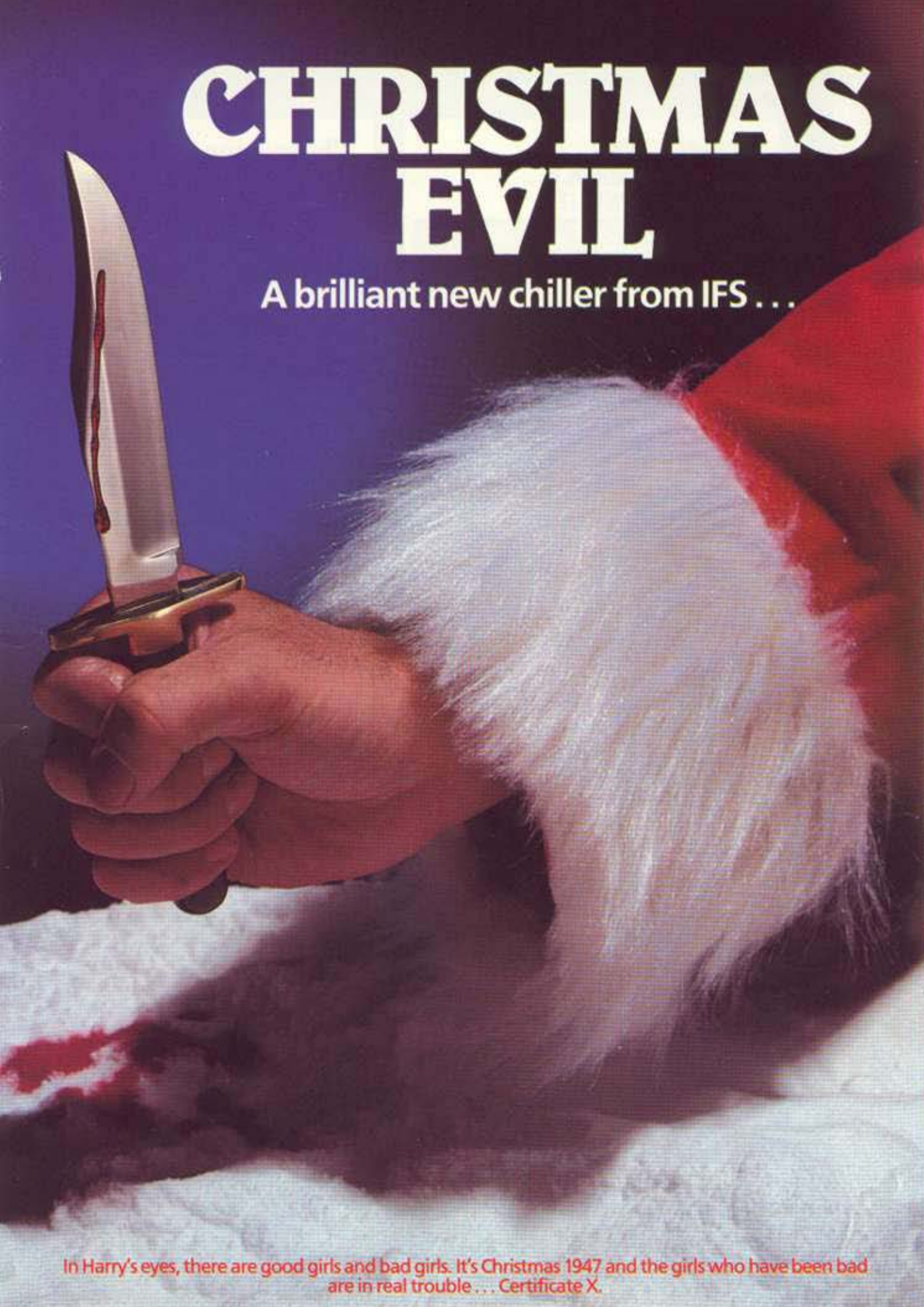
Next Issue:: Science Fiction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